

# LITTLE FRIENDS IN FEATHERS



INEZ N. MCFEE

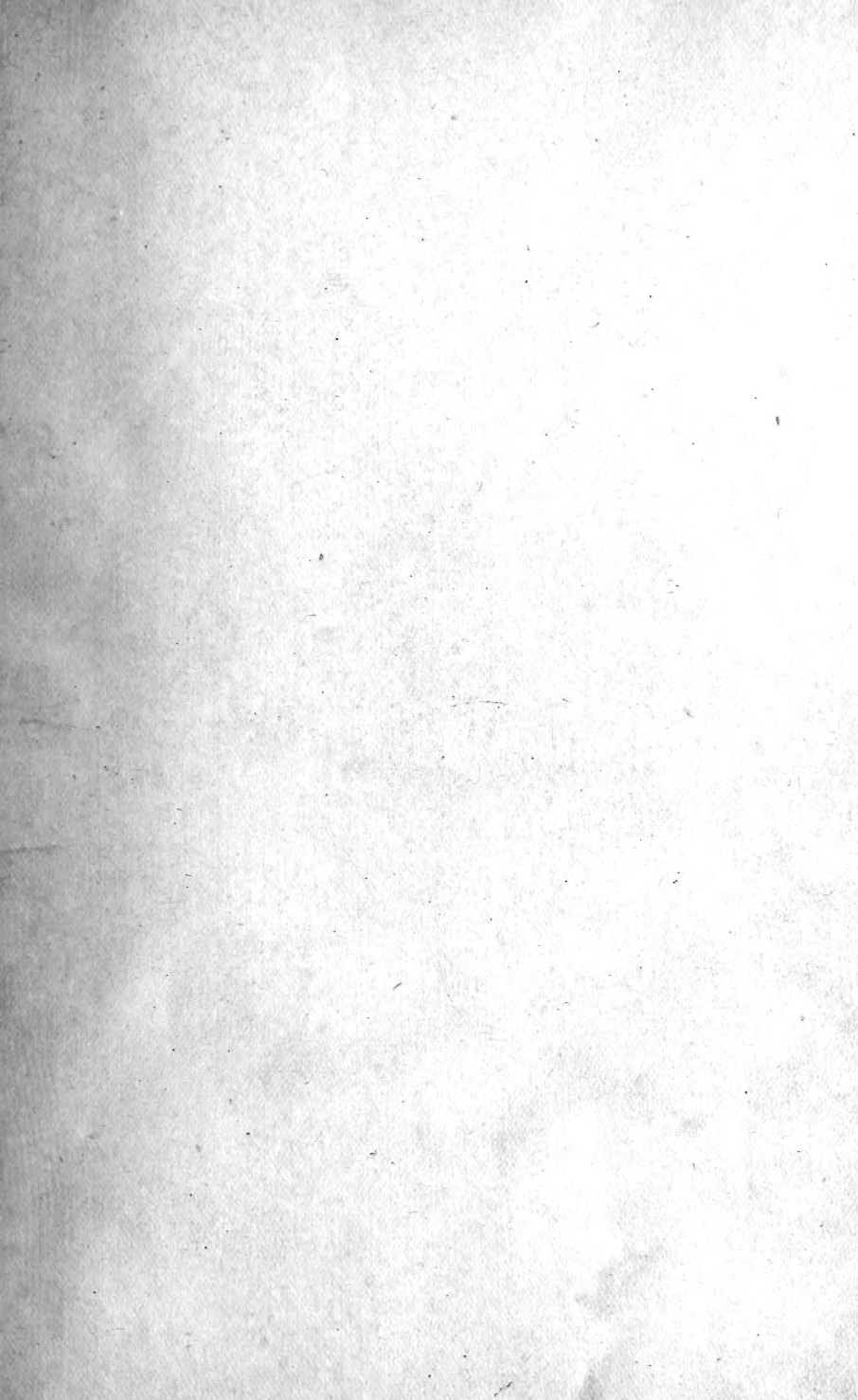


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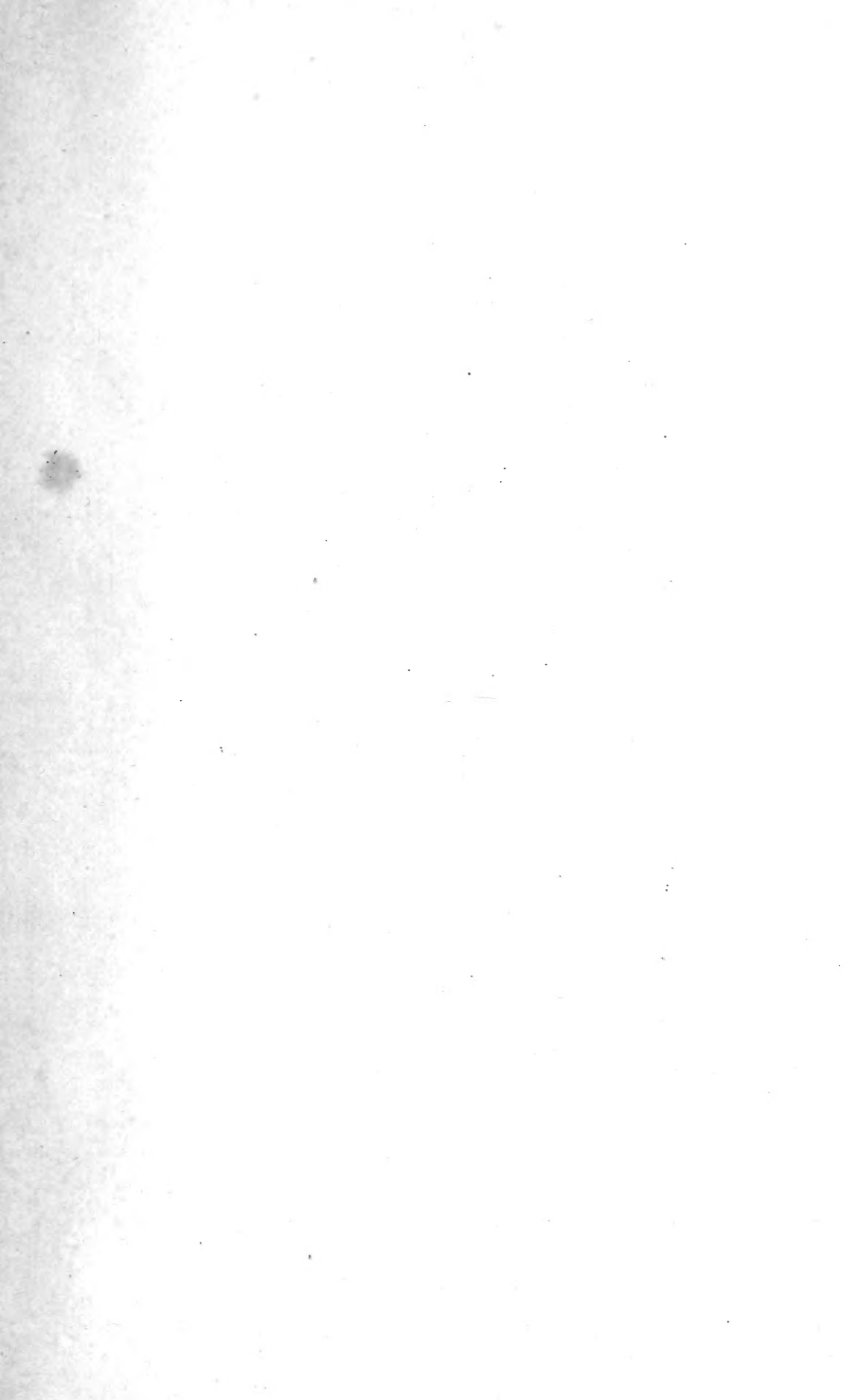
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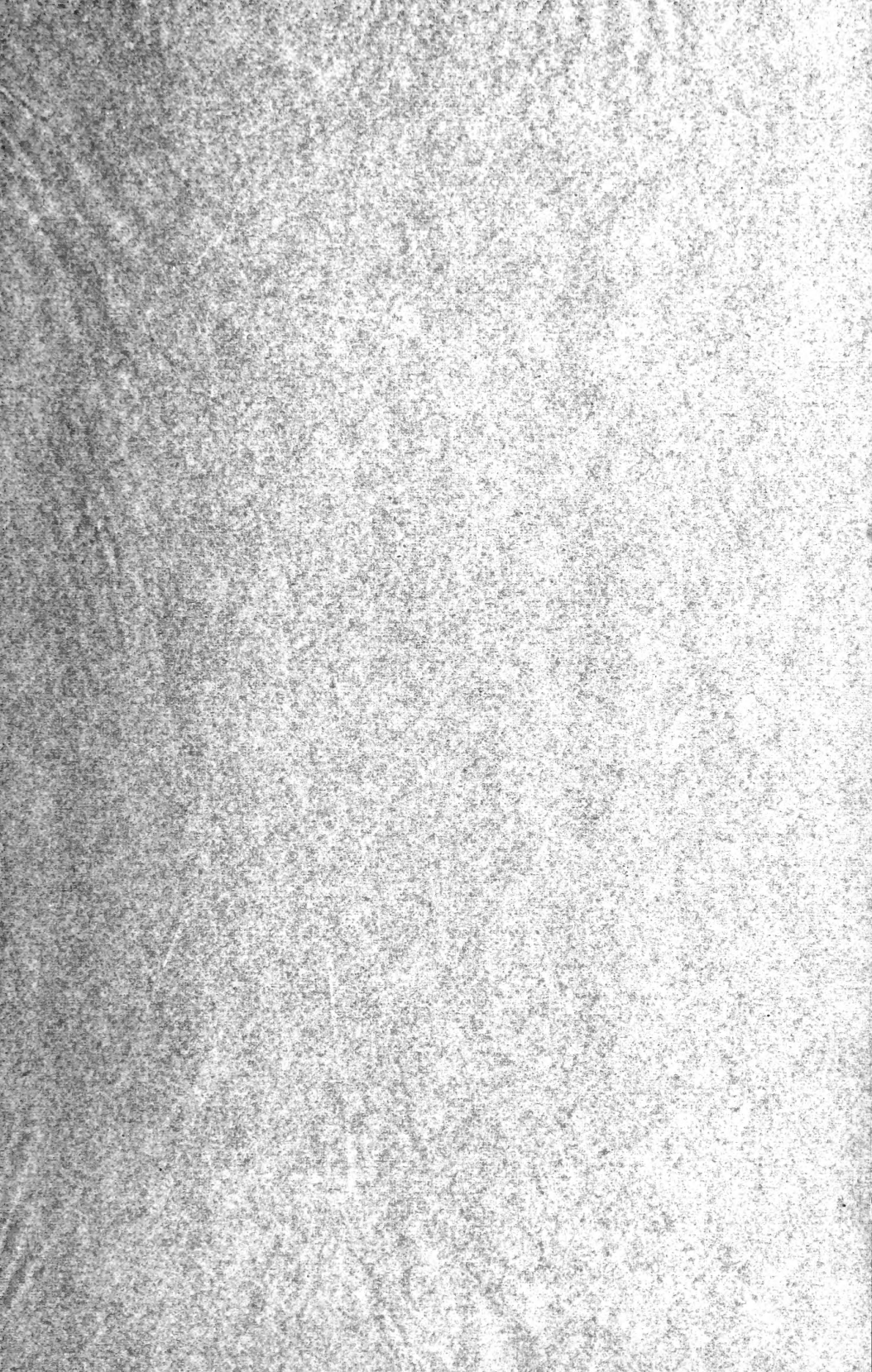


ROBIN

Order—PASSERES  
Genus—PLANESTICUS

Family—TURDIDÆ  
Species—MIGRATORIUS

National Association of Audubon Societies





# LITTLE FRIENDS IN FEATHERS

BY  
INEZ N. McFEE



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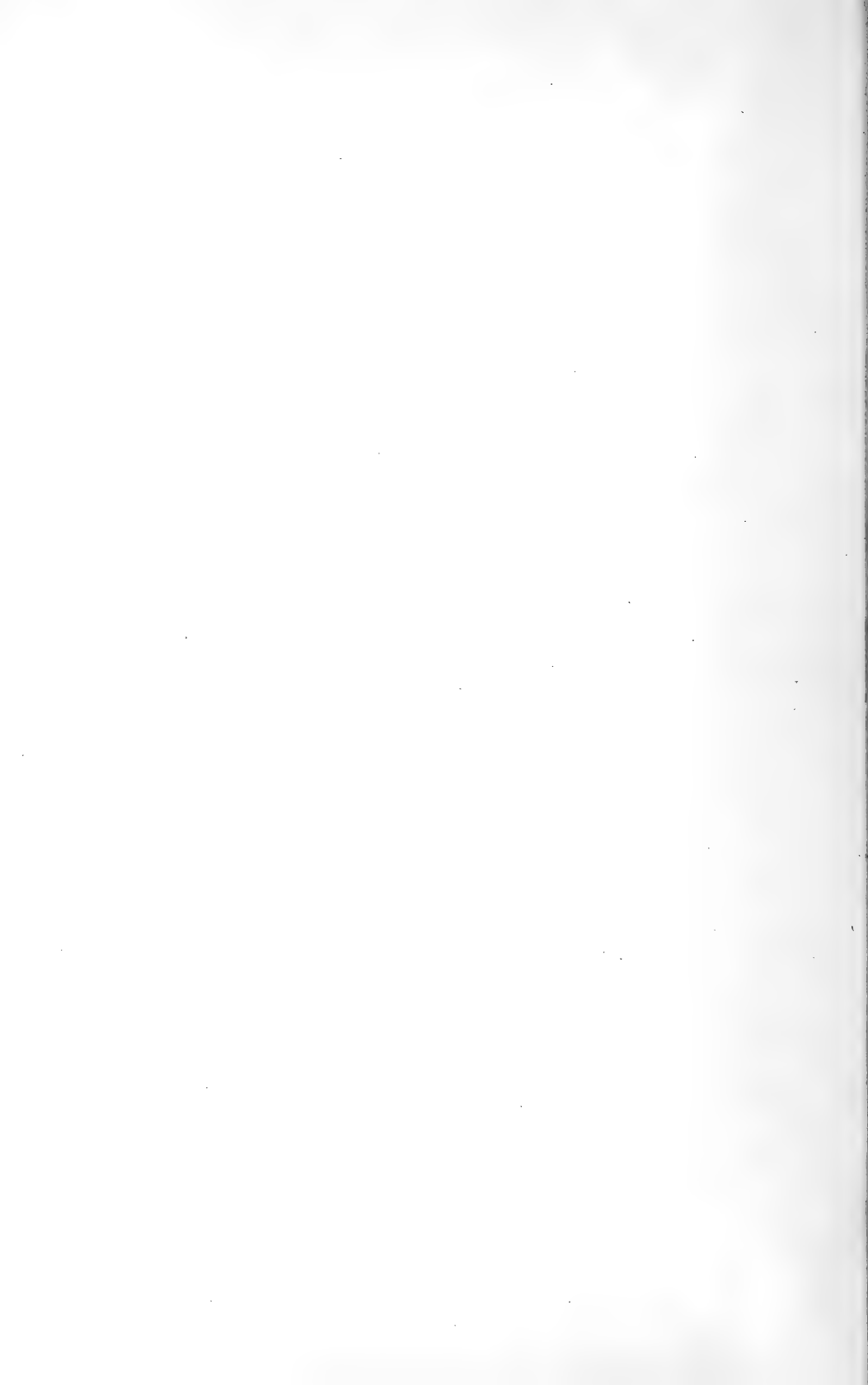
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## PREFACE

We want you to know our "Little Friends in Feathers" almost as well as you know your human friends. We want you to be able to call them by name, instead of saying, "Oh, that is just a bird." That is why this book is written.

It is not "scientific"—that is, it does not try to give learned Latin names of orders and species. It is just a chatty description of such feathered friends as the author has come to know and to love, and there is no reason why each one of her readers may not make these delightful friends and neighbors their very own. As they flit by our window they are cheerfully doing their bit in the economy of nature, making the world a brighter, happier place for us all. Wouldn't it be a dreary old world indeed without the birds!

For the beautiful color plates that adorn the book we are indebted to the courtesy of the National Association of Audubon Societies, and especially to their chief executive, Mr. T. Gilbert Pearson. We also wish to thank Mr. David S. Beasley and The University Society for permission to use the many black-and-white drawings which are scattered through the text.



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# LITTLE FRIENDS IN FEATHERS

## MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE BIRDS

Birds, birds! ye are beautiful things,  
With your earth-treading feet and your cloud-cleaving  
wings,

Where shall man wander, and where shall he dwell—  
Beautiful birds—that ye come not as well?

—*Birds and All Nature.*

**A**CCORDING to an old legend, all the birds were once helpless things with burdens instead of wings. But they bore their burdens with brave hearts, ever striving and upreaching toward the blue heaven, and finally by means of much stretching, the burdens lengthened into wings, and the birds became joyous, happy creatures, free to soar upward in the bright blue sky, or to sing merrily, mad with joy, from the topmost branches of some leafy tree.

Aside from the pleasure the birds afford us by their sweet songs, their beautiful plumage, and their innocent ways, they are very useful. Indeed, wise men say that we could not live upon the earth without the birds. They are Nature's

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army and they carry on a constant warfare with injurious insects, choking weeds, and destructive rodents of all sorts. Without them as allies, agriculture would gradually go to satisfy the terrible appetites of the increasing thousands of rodents and insects. In his tale of *The Birds of Killingworth*, Longfellow tells us what happened in a village where the town council was mad enough to order all the birds slain because they fancied they ate a little too much of the crops.

The days were like hot coals; the very ground  
Was burned to ashes; in the orchards fed  
Myriads of caterpillars, and around  
The cultivated fields and garden beds  
Hosts of devouring insects crawled, and found  
No foe to check their march, till they had made  
The land a desert without leaf or shade.

Glad indeed were the people of Killingworth to acknowledge their error and to import birds into their community from far and near. But their experience did not serve as sufficient warning to other folks in real life. In certain of our western States, acts were once passed giving bounties on hawks and owls. And not until the grasshoppers had increased so that they threatened to rival the Biblical plague and the field mice had destroyed many a noble orchard and alfalfa crop, did the legislatures awake to their folly, and repeal the laws. Then the hawks and owls, the

one working by night and the other by day, flew to the rescue, and with the help of the crows and of the gulls and herons which flew inland almost for the purpose, it would seem, the pests quickly disappeared.

You may know whether a bird is a pest or a blessing by what he eats. Some birds do all good and no harm; few, if any, can be said to do no good. The Biological Survey and the Audubon Societies of our country have been of inestimable help in determining what birds are useful, not only by watching their habits in life, but by actual examination of the contents of their stomachs. They have found that, "The thrushes, wrens, larks, and sparrows scour the surface of the earth for insects. The warblers, nuthatches and creepers inhabit the trees and bushes, and few insects escape their microscopic eyes. The woodpeckers, besides looking after the limbs and bark of trees by digging into the wood, draw forth and devour the burrowing larvæ which are safe from all other foes. Flycatchers and warblers snap up the winged insects as they fly from tree to tree, and nighthawks and swallows patrol the high air above pastures, bushes and trees, on the alert for those of the enemy who have escaped pursuit below. The waters and their shores also have their feathered police which keep in subjection the marauding insects and rodents,

except where man destroys the balance of nature by killing the patrols."

It is a matter of pride that our country is so fully alive to the importance of its birds and that it has taken so many active steps for their protection. We have very strict bird immigration laws, game bird laws of one sort and another, and some fifty or more island bird-reservations off the coast of Florida, Oregon, and California, where the feathered beauties may nest in safety. A few States have laws forbidding women to wear birds' wings, plumes, or whole birds on their hats! But happily the need for such laws is becoming rare. Women no longer wish to satisfy their vanity at the expense of the birds. They have come to see that "life and joy and song are costly trimmings for a woman's bonnet."

All the trades are represented among the birds. For instance, the robin is a mason. See him daub mud and clay on that forked twig, and mix in straw and sticks to hold it together! The woodpecker is a carpenter. Look at him over there drilling a neat, circular opening into that hollow tree! By and by, he and his industrious mate will have a nice warm home deep down in the trunk of the tree. The oriole is a weaver, and a very skillful one too. Where are the hands that could fashion a swing nest-cradle and fasten it so securely in the apple tree, that even the

strongest winds can not avail to dislodge it?

By examining a bird's nest, one can nearly always tell what sort of tools the builder used. Thus, the oriole, the hummingbird, and the little marsh wren, with their long, sharp bills, can easily weave a dainty nest; but the grosbeak, with his thick clumsy bill, can only manage to lay his nest loosely together. There is a vast amount of art shown in the construction of a nest from cast-off hairs and feathers, dead rootlets, bits of bark, and all sorts of odds and ends, such as no other creature would care to use. And it is all still more wonderful when we consider that the little worker is limited to just two tools—a beak and a pair of claws!

A bird's nest. Mark it well, within, without;  
No tool had he to work, no knife to cut;  
No nail to fix, no bodkin to insert;  
No glue to join; his little beak was all.  
And yet how neatly finished! What nice hand,  
With every implement and means of art,  
And twenty years' apprenticeship to boot,  
Could make me such another?

The selection of the place where the home is to be built is a very serious problem for the birds, and it is always considered very carefully. Indeed, so grave is the question that some birds, like the oriole, settle the question once for all time, and return to the same home year after year,

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It has been noticed that birds always build their nests near the places where their food is found, and at the time of the year when this food is the most plentiful. Both of these provisions are very wise, as most young birds are extremely greedy and keep their devoted parents constantly on the move even to satisfy their hunger in part. Some birds, such as the chickadee, nuthatch, and brown creeper, do not build nests of their own, but hunt around until they find a second-hand one which is to their liking. The cowbird does not like the responsibility of being a mother and having to care for and feed her babies, so she watches her chance and lays her eggs in the nests of other birds. This is a great annoyance to the owner of the nest who is wise enough to detect the deception, for if the egg is allowed to hatch, the baby is so greedy that he eats far more than his share, and when he gets large enough often crowds his little foster brothers and sisters out of the nest, and they perish. Some birds are quick to detect the trick. They can not throw out the egg; it is too large, so there is nothing to do but build a new home. Often we find homes among the warblers that are built two or three nests, or stories, high.

Ye have nests on the mountains, all rugged and stark,  
Ye have nests in the forest, all tangled and dark;  
Ye build and ye brood 'neath the cottagers' eaves,

And ye sleep on the sod 'mid the bonny green leaves;  
Ye hide in the heather, ye lurk in the brake,  
Ye dine in the sweet flags that shadow the lake;  
Ye skim where the stream parts the orchard decked land,  
Ye dance where the foam sweeps the desolate strand.

It is interesting to watch the birds come and go, as they journey from one community, or clime, to another. Birds migrate as soon as their supply of food begins to fail. The birds which devour insects are the first to go, leaving the latter part of August or the first of September. As a rule, most birds congregate in flocks and journey together. As these birds go South, the juncos, pine finches, winter wrens, shrikes, and others, arrive from the North and remain throughout the winter, and until our summer friends begin to come back in March.

Birds fly very swiftly, often going a mile a minute, and if the wind is favorable, keeping it up hour after hour. Swifts have been known to fly two hundred miles an hour. Wild geese travel from twelve to fifteen hundred miles a day. Did you ever see a flock of them on the wing? It is an interesting sight. They fly in two lines which meet in a wedge-shaped point. The leader takes his place at the point and guides the flock; when he gets too tired, he falls back and one of his aides takes the helm. The flock always keeps in perfect order, even while the leaders are chang-

ing. They fly many thousands of miles to the North to build their nests in summer. It is said that the tiny flame-breasted hummingbird travels a distance of over two thousand miles twice every year. He builds his nest as far north as Alaska, and winters in Lower California and Mexico.

Some birds can fly faster than others because their wings are better shaped for flying. All birds which take long journeys have strong, long, pointed wings, while those which fly only a short distance have short, rounded wings. A bird's body is built for flight. Its plumage is very light, that of the largest owl only weighing about one and one-half ounces. The shape of the body and the backward arrangement of the feathers aid the bird in its flight. The hollow bones and quill feathers are filled with air and the air sacs extending through the body, even through the bones, are connected with the lungs. The light plumage, the expansion of warm air, and the strength of the tail and wing feathers enable the bird to move through the air with an easy, gliding motion.

Most birds fly by day, but there are some, such as the whippoorwill and kingfisher, that journey only at night. These usually fly very high, unless they are prevented by fog or storm. Sometimes during storms the birds lose their way, be-



cause their eyes cannot see to magnify objects as they do when the weather is clear, and thus they dash against tall buildings or wires, and meet with death. It is a question how the birds know where to go the first year. Probably they listen to the guide calls of the old birds and go under their escort.

Often birds change their clothes during the year. Their feathers get worn by storms and by brushing against the branches of trees, and they drop out one by one, as the season advances, and are replaced by new ones. The new fall suit is often so different from that worn during the summer that we almost fail to recognize familiar friends when they appear on the lawn. Take the goldfinch, for instance. His summer plumage is a very bright gold, with shining jet-black trimmings. In the fall, he appears before us in a very demure suit of somber grayish-brown. And our gay, dashing friend, Robert of Lincoln, in his neat shining suit of glossy black, with white trimmings, looks like anything but himself in his fall dress of yellowish-brown! Indeed, the once saucy fellow seems half-ashamed of himself and slinks away among the grasses, his merry song forgotten, and with only one thought in his befuddled little brain—that of filling his stomach. It is said that the change of plumage is a wise provision of Mother Nature's to disguise and pro-

tect the birds from their enemies in the air and field, as they journey to the southland. But in spite of this protection, the loss during migration is always very great, and no doubt that little bird considers himself fortunate who manages to make the trip without encountering storms, cannibal birds, or the gun of man.

It is in the spring that the birds wear their brightest plumage and sing their sweetest songs. It is then that they are most gay and active and repay one for every moment spent in watching them. Neltje Blanchan, in her interesting book, "Bird Neighbors," says: "Not to have so much as a bowing acquaintance with the birds that nest in our gardens or under the very eaves of our houses; that haunt our wood-piles; keep our fruit trees free from slugs; waken us with their songs, and enliven our walks along the roadside and through the woods, seems to be, at least, a breach of etiquette toward some of our most kindly disposed neighbors."

I once knew a crippled girl whose greatest enjoyment was to lie by her open window and watch the birds which came to the old apple tree close at hand. And you would be surprised to know how many stragglers from the great army of spring and fall migrants found their way there! It seemed as though they knew one pair of bright eyes would welcome them eagerly! So you see

you can study birds whether you live in the city or in the country, whether you have one tree or a dozen—the main thing is to keep your eyes open.

In the following pages you will read of the feathered friends that I have come to know and to love. I am sure you will be interested in them, and that you will want to make the whole group friends of your own. And there is really no reason why you cannot do this! Some one has said: "You must first have the bird in your heart before you seek him in the bush." So read the description of each bird friend carefully, get a clear mental picture of him, and an idea of his personal traits and characteristics; then you will know him when you meet him. You will have a card of introduction, as it were, and you can get on a friendly footing at once. See how many real bird secrets you can discover this season! For a beginning, suppose you ascertain beyond a doubt what it is that the robins whisper about at three o'clock in the morning! 'Tis a problem that has puzzled many.

I. N. M.

## THE ROBIN

**E**VERYBODY knows the robin. Since the very earliest times people have been hearing and telling wonderful things about him. In that old, old ballad, "The Babes in the Woods," we read of the robin redbreast's strange custom of burying the uncared-for dead with leaves and soft woodland mold. Of course, the robin redbreasts described in this poem are not our own beloved robins, but their cousins, the merry little robin redbreasts of England.

It was an unwritten law in early days that to injure or molest a robin would bring swift vengeance from on High. The youngster in those days well knew the warning that:

A robin in a cage  
Sets all heaven in a rage.

And that:

The robin and the wren  
Are God Almighty's cock and hen,  
Him that harries their nest  
Never shall his soul have rest.

Probably it was this old rhyme, coupled with the native English love for these two favorite birds, that led the poet to write those well-known

lines regarding the wedding of Cock Robin and Jenny Wren. He told very happily of the charming courtship, the gay marriage, the picnic dinner, and of how the guests drank to the health of the bride and groom:

For each took a bumper  
And drank to the pair;  
Cock Robin, the Bridegroom,  
And Jenny Wren, the fair.

Then while the guests were singing a grand chorus, it occurred to the poet that it really was a poor match and that the wren and the robin could never be true mates, so he nibbled his pen and finally decided to bring in tragedy and end the affair. So in came an angry cuckoo who had not been bidden to the wedding festivities, and jostled rudely against the frightened little bride. An uproar followed, and the sparrow, who was best man, took it upon himself to avenge the bridegroom. He hurried out and came back with his trusty weapon, the bow and arrow, and shot at the offender. But, like many another excited marksman, he missed his aim and shot the handsome bridegroom, Cock Robin. A sad ending to an improbable tale! But some way we are glad that this mating never came any nearer happening, for now we have Mr. and Mrs. Robin as near alike as two peas, the female being only slightly duller in color and with a paler breast.

There is an Algonquin Indian legend about the origin of our own American robin; I wonder if you have ever read it. Whittier tells us all about it in one of his beautiful poems. It seems that there was once a great chief who wished to



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

ROBIN

The best known and most popular of all birds.

make a brave, noble warrior of his only son. According to Indian methods, this could be done only by causing the lad to endure many hardships and privations, so he was shut up alone in a great, lonely lodge.

Seven days the fast he kept,  
Seven nights he never slept.  
Then the young boy, wrung with pain,  
Weak from nature's overstrain,  
Faltering, moaned a low complaint:  
"Spare me, father, for I faint!"  
But the chieftain, haughty-eyed,  
Hid his pity in his pride:  
"You shall be a hunter good,  
Knowing never lack of food;  
You shall be a warrior great,  
Wise as fox and strong as bear;  
Many scalps your belt shall wear,  
If with patient heart you wait  
Bravely till your task is done."

Early the next morning the chief hurried to the lodge with moose meat and boiled samp, but lo, the boy was dead! Human flesh could stand no more. As they made his grave, a brown bird with a red breast, a bird no one remembered to have seen before, perched on the lodge-top and sang as with a human tongue:

"I, a bird, am still your son,  
Happier than if hunter fleet,  
Or a brave, before your feet  
Laying scalps in battle won.  
Friend of man, my song shall cheer  
Lodge and corn-land; hovering near,  
To the wigwam I shall bring  
Tidings of the coming spring."

And how nobly the bird has carried out its

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promise! In the sun and in the rain we hear his merry "Cheer-up, cheer, cheer!" Who can be sad and gloomy when he pipes his merry strain?

The robin has been a sacred bird ever since he tried so vainly to draw out some of the cruel thorns from the Savior's brow as He hung on the cross. Indeed, many people claim that it was here that he dyed his gray breast red in the blood that nothing could wash away.

But there are many stories as to how Robin came by his red breast. Whittier says:

Have you not heard,  
My poor, bad boy! of the fiery pit,  
And how, drop by drop, this merciful bird  
Carries the water that quenches it?

He brings cool dew in his little bill,  
And lets it fall on the souls of sin;  
You can see the mark on his red breast still,  
Of fires that scorch as he drops it in.

An old Norse myth tells us that there was once but one fire to keep the earth warm. It was built away in the far north, and tended by an old man and his little son. One day the father fell ill, and for many weary days the brave boy tended the fire and cared for the sick man. At last the tired lad fell asleep, and the fire died down till nothing was left but a few blackened embers. The white bear ran out and trod upon them till



he thought the fire was quenched. As he ran growling back to his cave, a little gray robin flew down and searched with her sharp eyes until she found a tiny, live spark. This she patiently fanned with her wings. Although her little breast was scorched red, she did not give up until the fire grew into a bright blaze. Then she flew away with a burning brand. Wherever she stopped, a fire soon began to burn, and thus the whole northland was lighted up.

Dear "Bron Rhuddyn," however you came by your red vest, it is a most beautiful one and very becoming to you!

The robin is a typical American, joyous and free. "There is something distinctly human about the robin," says Burroughs; "his is the note of boyhood." No other bird can say so much in a single note. He questions, chatters suspiciously, cries out in alarm or anger, and twitters lovingly to his mate, all within the space of a half hour. His love song, like that of most birds, is his best song, and is at its height in the springtime of the year,—a liquid, happy, cheerful melody, full of the beauty of the earth and sky and the many charms of his demure little mate.

As a rule, the robins are kind and sociable to other birds, but they are revengeful and will fight a rival or an enemy tooth and nail. They are among the most graceful of our birds and are

famous bathers, but there their neatness ends. We are shocked when we view their home. It is worse than a hurrah's nest, if you've any idea what that is! Such a shabby, hastily-built affair of sticks and straw, plastered together with mud, and so dirty that we can scarcely see that it once had a soft, well-woven downy lining! Ah, Mrs. Robin, for all your softness and daintiness, you are a sorry housekeeper!

But you are everything to Robin,  
Silent partner though you be;  
Source and theme and inspiration  
Of each madrigal and glee.

And his bright eyes can see no fault in you! This is well; some husbands would be driven to drink by your untidiness!

Mr. and Mrs. Robin raise two families of four or five birdies each, every year. They come back to the same tree season after season, and often begin housekeeping without bothering to clean or repair the old nest. The little robins do not seem to mind their dirty surroundings, and are as hearty, cheery, and homely as little birdies can well be, getting out of the nest at the age of eleven days and hopping about on their wobbly legs, soon joining in the chorus of their father's jubilant song with a weak, piping "Cheer! Cheer!"

Robin is a member of the Thrush family and own cousin to the bluebird. He is a very indus-

trious fellow and fully believes in catching the early worm. He has a great appetite and has been known to eat more than his weight in worms every twelve hours. He is a "ground gleaner, a tree trapper, and a seed sower," and one of man's best friends.

You will know him by his distinctive size and markings. He is a husky fellow about ten inches long with long tail and plump breast of reddish hue. His head is black, upper parts gray, and the red under parts have white trimmings. The wings are somewhat pointed and long. The tail feathers are broad and slightly rounded; they are black and show white marks when the bird is flying. Mrs. Robin is not nearly so well-dressed as her liege-lord, all of her colors being paler.

## THE BLUEBIRD

Winged lute that we call a bluebird, you blend in a silver strain  
The sound of the laughing water, the patter of spring's sweet rain,  
The voice of the winds, the sunshine, and fragrance of blossoming things.  
Ah! you are an April poem that God has dowered with wings.

—*Rexford.*

**T**HE bluebird, or blue robin, as some people call him, is the first bird to tell of the coming spring. He comes when the fields are bare, and begins to warble over them:—

“Summer is coming, summer is coming,  
I know it, I know it—  
Light again, leaf again, love again!”

And what a change his song seems to make! Warmth and new-budding life appear everywhere as if by magic. If cold winds pipe over the plain, and storm clouds sweep the sky, he carols still more sweetly and encouragingly, and his low notes seem to burst the bonds of winter.

He has been called “the banner-bearer of Bird-

land," "the minstrel of April," "the angel of springtime," and "the bird with the Easter message," and he has every right to each loving title. His song has been put into words by many admirers, and to each one he has given a different message. Burroughs hears him say, "Bermuda! Bermuda!" and "Purity! Purity!" Another thinks he says that his song is "Trually, Truly, True!" At the close of the summer his song is low and rather mournful, as though he were saying over and over again, "Dear! Dear! Think of it! Think of it!" No doubt he mourns the loss of the happy days gone by, yet he may have in mind only his beautiful plumage which has disappeared with the leaves and the flowers. Listen to his notes. What does he say to you?

Hark! how the music leaps out from his throat!

Hark! was there ever so merry a note?

Listen awhile and you'll hear what he's saying,

Up in the apple tree swinging and swaying.

"Little white snowdrops! I pray you arise;

Bright yellow crocus! come, open your eyes;

Daffodils! Daffodils! say, do you hear?

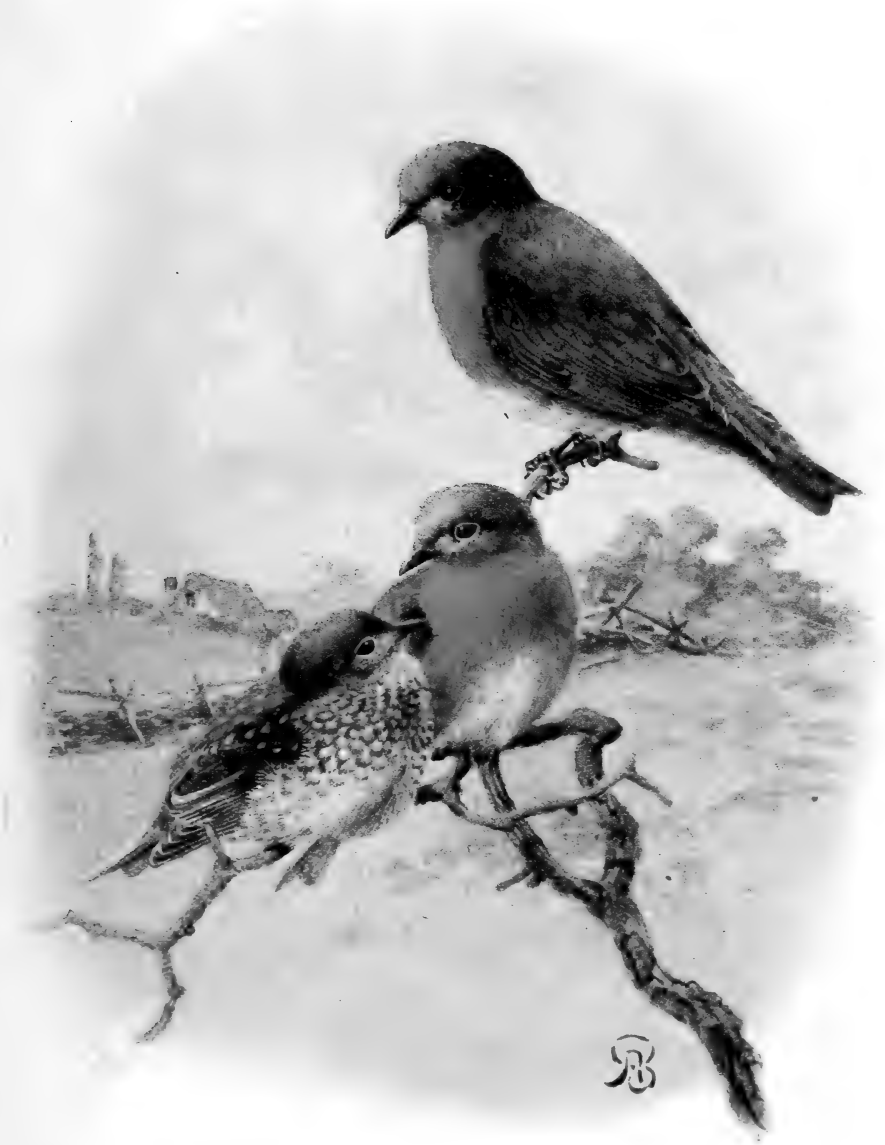
Summer is coming, and springtime is here!"

The bluebird belongs to the Thrush family, and is like his cousin robin in many ways. He is about three inches shorter than robin, or about seven inches long. His coat is like a bit of bright

blue sky. His throat, breast, and sides are cinnamon red and his under parts are white. His bill is black. He has dark legs, but strangely enough the soles of his feet are yellow. There is a pretty legend which tells how he came by these yellow soles.

It seems that before and during the time of the flood the birds did not have feathers to protect them. When the land birds were gathered into the ark, they huddled together on one side of the boat and twittered about the good days coming. But by and by, as the rain continued, it grew very cold, and nearly all the birds stopped singing. However, there were two whose spirits did not seem to be at all dampened by the dreary weather, and they continued blithe and gay, seeking to make the best of things. At last the rain stopped and a tiny ray of sunshine glanced through a crack. These birds, always on the lookout for bright things, sprang upon it at once. There was just enough bright gold to cover the soles of their feet, and it stained them so deeply that it would not rub off.

The bluebird's brilliant coat is also nicely accounted for. It seems that they were the first birds to leave the ark, flying straight toward heaven, singing as they went. Mr. Bluebird was a little in advance of his mate, and when he came to the blue sky he never stopped, but pushed his



BLUEBIRD

Order—PASSERES  
Genus—SIALIA

Family—TURDIDÆ  
Species—SIALIS

National Association of Audubon Societies





way right through, and in so doing rubbed some of the blue tint into his uncolored feathers, that had grown in a flash when he left the boat. Mrs. Bluebird flew right through after him, but of course she did not get as much paint as her lord because the hole was nearly rubbed dry of its tint.

Mr. and Mrs. Bluebird often raise three families in a season. They go to housekeeping early in April, and for a time Mr. Bluebird fills all the air with his mad carols. The home is often an old woodpecker residence, though they may take a notion to Jenny Wren's comfortable quarters and drive her away without bothering to serve notice. They like to build in the bird houses which people put up in their gardens, but their enemies, the English sparrows, will seldom allow it. Usually the birds have to content themselves with a hole in a hollow tree or fence post.

Unlike her cousin, Mrs. Robin, Madam Bluebird is a very neat housekeeper. If the chosen home has been occupied before, she gives it a very careful cleaning. Then the nest is begun. It is quickly made of sticks and straw and dried grasses and lined with hair. From four to six pale blue eggs, about an inch in length, are laid for a sitting.

At first the little bluebirds are not blue at all. They are almost black. Like many other little

birds, they have speckled breasts, which they discard like bibs as soon as they learn to eat and behave like their elders. They get their handsome blue color very slowly so as not to turn their heads, we suspect. When they are from fifteen to twenty days old they leave the nest. This is often a rather difficult feat when the nest happens to be way down in a hollow tree. It is said that the old birds build up a little ladder for them to climb out on. As soon as they are introduced to the outer world, the father takes them in hand and trains them up in the way they should go, while the mother raises another brood.

Bluebirds are valuable citizens. It is said that a single pair of birds will destroy from fifty thousand to one hundred thousand worms in a single season. Like the last leaves on the tree, they linger, forsaken, yet true to their home, and hoping for a brighter to-morrow until the chill winds of November drive them away. The bluebird is well-known throughout the United States east of the Rocky Mountains and from Canada to the Gulf. In Arkansas, the home of the writer, they are resident birds, and come close about the door in winter in search of crumbs.

## THE THRUSHES

"Ah, will you, will you?" sings the thrush,  
Deep in his shady cover,  
"Ah, will you, will you live with me,  
And be my friend and lover?"

"With woodland scents and sounds all day,  
And music we will fill you.  
For concerts we will charge no fee.  
Ah, will you—will you—will you?"

—*C. P. Cranch.*

**S**UPPOSE we accept the invitation and get acquainted with the whole Thrush family. You remember that the robin and the blue-bird belong to it. The thrushes hold a high place in the bird kingdom because of their beautiful voices. Most of them are very modest and unassuming in dress, being clothed in demure olive-brown, but they possess a noble bearing and have plenty of character. The story is told that when Mother Nature gave the birds their plumage, the thrush came last and the attractive colors were all gone. The oriole had chosen the orange; the canary was dressed in yellow; the blue-bird had selected the blue; the tanager had taken the red; and the doves and humming-birds had

monopolized the rainbow colors. The thrush gazed admiringly at their pretty gowns and said, "Never mind, dear mother, a plain brown dress is good enough for me, but give me a sweet voice, so that I may make the children happy."

Evidently the request was granted for the thrush's song has delighted both young and old since time immemorial. It was the thrush who was chosen from the great company of birds to sing the psalm at Cock Robin's funeral. He "sat in a bush" and no doubt brought tears to the eyes of his feathered audience. The thrush's songs are spiritual; they appeal to our higher, better emotions, and their music seems to voice our purest, noblest thoughts and aims.

Of the thrush family proper, there are five members—the olive-backed thrush, Alice's thrush, the hermit thrush, wood thrush, and Wilson's thrush or veery. The three last named are the best known and the sweetest singers, and the only ones we shall be apt to meet. Let us learn to know them well. The thrush is a high-bred, gracious bird, and his olive-brown coat and strikingly heart-shaped spots on his breast easily identify him. It takes only a little study to be able to distinguish between the veery, the wood thrush, and the hermit. The veery hides away, the wood thrush is willing to show you considerable confidence, and the hermit thrush, as his name indi-

cates, steals around by himself where the woodland shadows are deepest. The veery's voice vibrates mysteriously through the air in pulsating circles; the wood thrush's notes ring out like the chimes of a bell; while the hermit's hymn swells through the woods like the notes of a grand cathedral organ.

*THE WOOD THRUSH*

O, gentle soul of the forest,  
When hot the noon rays fall,  
You sing of the dim, cool shadows,  
With their peace and rest for all.

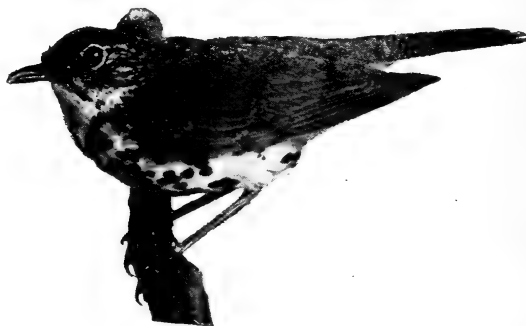
Teach us in the glow of morning,  
In the glare of bright noon day,  
In the dim of lengthening shadows,  
To brighten with music the way.

—*Compton.*

The wood thrush is about two inches shorter than the robin, or about eight inches long. He is known in different localities by the names of song thrush, wood robin, and bell-bird. The last name is given to him because of his beautiful bell-like voice which has a strong, rich metallic tone unlike any other bird utterance. Blanchan says: "His every gesture is graceful and elegant; even a wriggling beetle is eaten as daintily as caviare at the king's table." He is the tamest of the thrushes, and will give you his gentle con-

fidence if he finds that you do not abuse the trust.

Usually the wood thrush nests in the woods, though it is quite often found in groves near dwellings. The nest much resembles the robin's, save that it is deeper. The eggs are blue, after the fashion of all the thrush family. The wood



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

#### WOOD THRUSH

One of the friendliest of our little neighbors.

thrush guards his nest faithfully, and is very careful not to sing while near it. The opening notes of his song sound like "Come to me! Come to me!" and are said to be given by the wise little bird to lure intruders away from the egg treasures. His pure luscious love song has been translated into the following syllables, "*Uoli-a-e-o-linoli-nol-aeolie-lee!*"

The wood thrush is a beautiful warm brown color, like ground cinnamon; reddest on the head, shading into olive on the tail. His under parts

are plain white in the middle, but thickly marked on the breast and sides with very dark brown heart-shaped spots. He has a whitish eye ring. He arrives early in May, and usually stays until September. He is a ground-gleaner, a tree-trapper, and a seed-sower. We have often met him in walks through the garden, and have frequently seen him come to the edge of the back porch and peep in, but he never dared venture up on the boards.

*THE HERMIT THRUSH*

In the deep, solemn wood, at dawn I hear  
A voice serene and pure, now far, now near,  
Singing sweetly, singing slowly,  
"Holy; oh, holy, holy!"

Again at evening hush, now near, now far—  
Oh, tell me, art thou voice of bird or star?  
Sounding sweetly, sounding slowly,  
"Holy; oh, holy, holy!"

The Hermit Thrush, or Little Swamp Angel, as he is lovingly called, has the most exquisitely beautiful voice of any bird in America, and can be compared only to the nightingale of Europe. No words can convey a true idea of his music. He

. . . "sounds his magic flute  
And makes the woods a shrine."

John Burroughs calls his song the finest sound in Nature. "It is not a proud, gorgeous strain like the tanager's, or grosbeak's," he says; "it suggests no passion or emotion—nothing personal, but seems to be the voice of that calm, sweet solemnity one attains to in his best moments. It realizes a peace and a deep, solemn joy that only the finest souls may know."

The hermit thrush is the first thrush to come and the last to go, arriving early in April and leaving in November, though but few people catch a glimpse of him during his long residence. He is to be met only in damp, shady places where it is always twilight, in the fascinating haunts of the snail, slug, and beetle. He likes these clammy, silent neighbors; they are so useful at meal time, which is any time and all the time. If we steal quietly in the dusk of the early morning into the thick woods and stand very still for awhile, we may not only hear, but see the hermit. He is scratching away in the edge of the thicket where the leaf mold is the thickest, and pauses now and then to listen for overhead and underground sounds and to pour out his joy of living. Such rare food as he finds in his leafy haunts! The most wonderful insects and all sorts of outgrown and castoff finery, not to mention grasshopper nymphs and whole baskets full of eggs of all sorts hidden in the decaying logs. Like all



thrushes, he is a lover of berries, wild or tame, and delights to revel in a berry patch.

Few people have been fortunate enough to discover the hermit's nest. It is built of moss, coarse grass, or pine needles, and placed on the ground in some shadowy, secluded place. Housekeeping and the "struggle for bread" is of little consequence to a pair of hermits. Being placed in the very haunts of insects, the fledglings can help themselves to rambling creatures without even leaving the nest. The little hermits stay around the nest longer than most young birds, as their food is close at hand and they have no fondness for stretching their wings. Indeed, about the only flying the hermits indulge in is during the migrating season.

The hermit thrush is about seven inches long. His upper parts are olive-brown, reddening near the tail, which is pale russet, quite distinct from the color of the back. The breast, throat, and sides of the neck are pale buff. The feathers of the throat and neck are finished with dark arrow-points at the tip. The breast feathers have large rounded dark brown spots. The sides are brownish gray. Underneath parts are white. The hermit thrush is the most common in the eastern parts of the United States, though it ranges to the plains. It winters from southern Illinois and New Jersey to the Gulf.

*WILSON'S THRUSH, OR VEERY*

Thrilling sweet at the close of the day,  
Out of the dusk and the gloom,  
Softly muffled and far away  
Under the dogwood's bloom,  
Cometh the voice of a lonely bird  
Chanting the song of the trees;  
Solemnly, weirdly the air is stirred,  
Trembles the twilight breeze.

The Wilson's thrush, or veery, is a very shy, elusive bird, "a sort of vocal will-o'-the-wisp" who often entices us into the heart of the damp forests and then suddenly forsakes us. Dwellers near the woodland often hear the veery's voice thrilling through the silent watches of the night the "songs of long ago." It is said that a person may sit quietly down on a log in the deep shadows, and draw a crowd of veeries by imitating their call note, a whistling *wheew-whoit*.

The veery is known in some localities as the tawny thrush. He is the smallest of the three common thrushes, and is not so strongly marked as the others. He also lacks the white ring about the eye which is a distinguishing feature of the other two. The veery is about one-fourth smaller than the robin. He has a slender, graceful form clothed in demure olive-brown. The center of his throat is white, but the sides and upper part of his breast are a creamy buff. His breast is



#### THE VEERY

Order—PASSERES  
Genus—HYLOCICHLA

Family—TURDIDÆ  
Species—FUSCESCENS FUSCESCENS

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lightly spotted with brown wedge-shaped points. The veery ranges through the United States westward to the plains, migrating in May and October.

## THE WOODPECKER FAMILY

“**W**OODPECKERS are no good,” says Johnny, stoutly. “They bore holes in trees and kill them.”

I wonder if you agree with him? If you do, you do not know the woodpeckers, that's all! Come with me to woodpecker land, and let us find out about them, really and truly. Where is this land? Oh, all about us; in the thickets and orchards, in the berry patches, and the woodland, in short, wherever there are borers, beetles, ants, grasshoppers, and such fruit as the poison ivy, dogwood and June berries, wild grapes and cherries. Keep your eye open for a bird clinging to the side of a tree “as if he had been thrown at it and stuck.”

Few birds are better adapted to their mode of life than the woodpecker is, the structure of his bill, tongue, tail, and feet being all admirably suited to his needs. His mission in life is to rid the trees of insects which hide beneath the bark, and he works industriously no matter what the weather.

The woodpecker is not a musical bird, and yet

his rolling tattoo would be missed from the woods and fields. This tattooing, or drumming, is made to answer several purposes, such as testing a limb to see whether it is green or hollow, scaring the insects from their hiding places under the bark, and hollowing out holes for nests. It also serves as a love song. Did you ever watch one of these feathered drummers pound out his song? How he seems to enjoy it! He picks out a sharp, rolling *k-r-r-r-ring*, and then peers proudly around as though challenging the whole woodpecker tribe to produce another as grand. He frequently punctuates each roll with his call note of *Peck! Peck!* which cuts the air like a chisel.

It is said that, in the land of Norway, the children will not feed this wicked bird. For it once did a very evil deed. It seems that, when on earth the Master trod, He stopped one evening, faint, weary, and footsore, at the door of a small cottage. The housewife, in a bright red hood, was busily making bread, and He begged eagerly for a loaf. Said she to herself: "My loaves are small, they will scarcely last till baking-day comes again. I will give the smallest one." But lo! when the loaf was in the oven, it grew and grew till it quite outstripped the others, and the dame could not bear to give it away. So she molded a smaller loaf and put it in to bake. Then, as before, the dough grew and became the largest

loaf. The dame was puzzled, but her stinginess did not abate. "'Tis much too large to give away," she said, and turned to make another loaf. Then, indeed, was the Master wroth. "Go up in your hood of fire," He cried sternly. "Fly forth, woodpecker vain, and seek your food 'neath bark and bole, with never a drink till it rains." So,

"From that day to this, with soot on wings,  
She tappeth the trees for her bread,  
And is ever athirst as she whistles for rain,  
With a warm red mutch on her head."

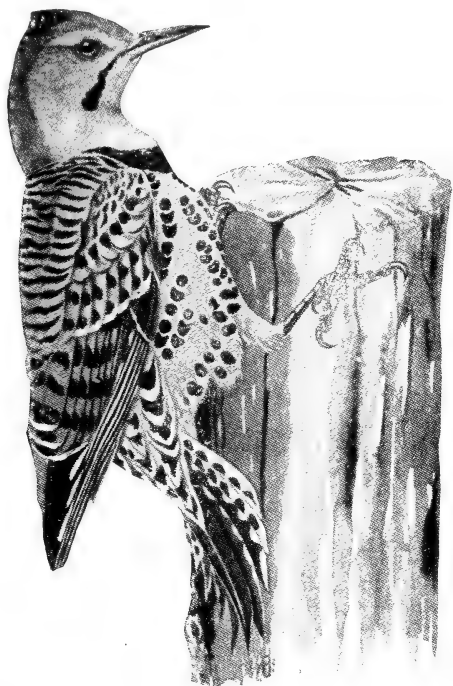
There are about thirty-five species of woodpeckers in North America, and, taken the world over, about three hundred and fifty birds cling to the family tree. We are not apt to meet more than five members of this world-famous family. They are the flicker, or golden-winged woodpecker, the downy, his big cousin, hairy, the red-headed woodpecker, and the yellow-bellied sapsucker.

#### *THE FLICKER*

The flicker, or golden-winged woodpecker, is the most charming and beautiful member of the family. He bears the whole world of color in his coat, and attracts so much attention wherever he goes that people have given him a host of names. He is called the yellow-hammer, the high-hole, the pigeon woodpecker, the yucker, the



hittock, the yarup, among others. In the Hudson Bay country the people call him the *Ou-thee-quan-nor-ow*. Down in Louisiana he is called *Monsieur Pique-bois-Jaune*.



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

#### FLICKER

A polite fellow who delights to wear pretty clothes.

You may have seen the flicker feeding along the ground in the pasture and mistaken him for a meadow-lark. The birds are nearly of a size, about eleven inches long and the flicker, like the

meadow-lark, wears black crescents on his breast. But the flicker has a deep red crescent on the nape of his neck, and there is a white patch at the base of the tail, which shows very plainly as he rises in the air.

The flicker is a very polite bird, and fairly overdoes himself bowing and scraping to his lady love. It is too funny! He is so evidently proud of his fine person. He stretches his wings and tail to show their admirable length and color. He bows low to exhibit his beautiful red neck crescent. He steps forward and back, bridling, and swelling out his breast to call attention to his fancy vest. And all the time he keeps up a dreamy, coaxing note like the swishing of a willow wand. Then, every once in a while, he spoils all his efforts with a silly, nervous laugh—*wick-a-wick-wick-a-wick-a*—so loud and shrill that it fairly makes one shiver.

Mr. Flicker is not nearly so much of a miner and grubber as the other members of his family. His chief food is ants, and his long, slender tongue is a fitting tool to probe into their galleries. When not in use, it lies in his bill like the wrinkled wrist of a glove.

The flickers drill a hole high up in the tree for their nest. As a rule, there are from six to eight pure white eggs that are as glossy as though they were enameled. Audubon claims to have found

a flicker's nest with eighteen hearty birdies and three eggs in it. This makes lots of work for the parent birds, for little woodpeckers need a great deal of food to make them grow properly and to be able to leave the nest in sixteen days. The parents feed them in a sickening fashion. That is, it is a sickening one to us. They do it by pumping food from their own stomachs down the birdies' throats. The mother bird just sticks her long bill way down the little chap's throat and shakes him and prods him until it would seem as though his head would come off. But it doesn't, and the little fellow really seems to like it! He is always wanting more, and he grows very rapidly.

The flicker's call note is a rousing *yarup!* He is most commonly seen from April to October, though if the winter is not too severe he is a resident bird. He is known over the United States east of the Rockies, in Alaska, and sometimes on the Pacific slope.

#### THE DOWNY WOODPECKER

Look on the trunk of an apple tree for the social downy, the smallest and perhaps the most useful of the woodpeckers. He is hardly more than six inches long, but he is "all there." Note his neat black and white coat, with the funny little red patch on the back of his neck. (Mrs.

Downy wears a white patch instead of a red one.) His tail is shaped like a wedge, and he uses it to prop himself securely against the tree.



Photo by H. K. Job

Courtesy of Outing Pub. Co.

DOWNY WOODPECKER AT WORK

He is the official apple-tree inspector.

See how industriously he works! He is an apple-tree inspector. From daylight till dark he searches for the rascally borers, and it takes a wise one to escape him. See him tap and then pause to listen. Ah! there is something in that crevice—"Come right out of there, Mr. Borer!"

Downy says, and disposes of the villain at once; for he is more than an inspector. He is policeman, judge, jury, jailer, and jail. Any loafer on the tree is considered a nuisance, and Downy swallows him without even giving him a chance to prove his innocence. He is past-master at stopping ant armies in full march, and it would be hard to guess how many beetle eggs he destroys in a day.

Downy stays with us all the year. No winter is too cold, no summer too hot for his business. He likes an occasional meal of fruit and vegetables, but it is always things which Nature furnishes offhand. He is partial to the haunts of man, and has been known to pick flies from the window pane. He loves to pound out his love song on a tin roof, for he cannot sing, and depends considerably upon his skill as a drummer in his wooing. Downy's nest is chiseled deep in the trunk of a tree, secure from the cold and wet, and the eggs, like those of all woodpeckers, are glossy white.

#### *THE HAIRY WOODPECKER*

The hairy woodpecker is a large edition of his cousin downy, being about midway between him and the flicker in size, but he is not nearly so sociable. He prefers a home in the forest, and is very quiet and unassuming, save at mating time,

when his loud drummings fill the woods. But woe to the little maid who listens to him! for hairy is a selfish fellow and a long way from a model husband. As winter draws near, he makes himself a nice cozy home in the heart of a tree and leaves his wife to shift for herself, not allowing her to so much as darken his door. In the spring, however, he quickly relents, and makes all sorts of fresh, enticing promises to the neglected one, and she, poor thing, forgives him and comes back, with a heart full of hope, only to be treated again in the same shabby fashion. The call note of the hairy woodpecker is loud and shrill and somewhat resembles that of the kingfisher. His coat is black and white, his vest white, and he has a dab of red on his head—a touch of color that Mrs. Hairy lacks.

#### *THE RED-HEADED WOODPECKER*

The red-headed woodpecker wears the national colors, red, white, and blue, so dignifiedly, that many think he, instead of the eagle, should be our national bird, particularly as he is so much more common. He has been called the Flag Bird—but alas for his reputation, sometimes his blue is so black that he is accused of wearing the German colors. He is a merry drummer, coming and going to suit himself, where beechnuts



RED-HEADED WOODPECKER

Order—PICI

Family—PICIDÆ

Genus—MELANERPES

Species—ERYTHROCEPHALUS

National Association of Audubon Societies





and grasshoppers are plentiful. He hides a winter's store of food in odd crannies—hollow trees, knot holes in buildings and fence posts, crevices in railroad ties, even pounding them in between roof shingles, covering them carefully with bark and leaves. The red-head does very little grubbing. He prefers to pick up his food, and is an expert fly-catcher. His home is a model of art, the doorway being leveled out in true carpenter style. The red-head's rattle is much like that of the tree-toad, and sounds like *ker-r-ruck, ker-r-ruck*.

The worst that can be said about the red-head, is that he is fond of feeding on the eggs of other birds. But this does not happen very often, so we are willing to believe that it is the work of some bloodthirsty or crazy red-head, and that it is not a family trait.

He is about nine inches long, and the noisiest of his tribe. His call is a cry sounding like *Queer*.

It is a curious fact that young red-head woodpeckers do not have red heads; their heads are gray. From four to six birdies fill the sawdust nest very comfortably. They are cheery, happy little chaps, and soon grow big enough to see the big world outside the nest, if their enemy, the black snake, does not find them out and eat them.

*THE YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER*

The yellow-bellied sapsucker is a nuisance, notwithstanding his good nature, his handsome plumage, and his skill in capturing slugs and insects while on the wing. He cares nothing for fruit, but

“He girdles the maple round and round:

’Tis heart-blood he drinks at each sweet wound:

And his bacchanal song is the tap-tap-tap

That brings from the bark the clear-flowing sap.”

—*Edith M. Thomas.*

He kills many fruit and shade trees every year with his little rows of “honey pots.” Because, you know, a tree lives only in its outer layers, and when it is girdled the sap cannot run up and down to nourish it. Of the shade trees, the sapsucker likes best the white birch and the maple. Do you know why?

The sapsucker is daintily marked with white, black, and yellow, with a bright red crown, chin and throat. He wears a large black crescent on his vest. A yellowish-white line begins at the bill and passes along below the eye down the side of the bird, finally merging into the yellow underparts. His wings are gayly decorated with white; his tail is black, with white on the middle of the feathers. He is about eight inches in length.

He seems to know that man has no reason to be his friend, and takes extra care in hiding his



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER

His habit of drilling into sap trees makes him a public nuisance.

nest, drilling way into the heart of the tree, that the young birds may be safe.

## THE BELTED KINGFISHER

**I** WONDER if you have ever met a bird fisherman? The belted kingfisher is just such a fellow. If you do not know him, you must watch out for him and make his acquaintance.

“O’er the river’s brink on a summer day,  
Where lingering shadows love to play,  
On an overhanging branch sits he,  
And waits and watches patiently;  
Until, with his ever-restless eye,  
He sees a silvery fish swim by.  
Then darting into the river’s flow,  
Like an arrow from an archer’s bow,  
With a daring flash and a splash of spray,  
He seizes hold of his finny prey,  
And flings a wild laugh to the skies,  
As he mounts above with his shining prize.”

—C. J. Hunt.

Every sportsman knows the belted kingfisher and can describe him to you. He is larger than the robin, being about twelve inches in length. His leading color is grayish-blue; his head is finely crested. There is a white spot in front of each eye. He wears a white band around his throat, and his wings and short tail are much

speckled. He has a broad bluish band, or belt, spotted with white, across his breast, hence his name "belted kingfisher." Young birds wear a chestnut belt. The kingfisher's bill is large and heavy.

There are nearly two hundred varieties of kingfishers, though only a dozen of them live in America. The headquarters of the family is in the East Indies. The belted kingfisher is the only one of the family that lives in the United States, with one exception, a cousin in southern Texas. He is familiar to every one who dwells near a river or pond.

The kingfisher is a born fisherman. His favorite haunts are well-wooded streams, lakes, and ponds where fish are plentiful, and where he can ply his trade in quietness and peace. His harsh, discordant cry breaks the stillness of the woodland.

Hark! What sound disturbs the stillness  
Of forest; of the meadow?  
Harsh the notes, a wild alarm,  
Waking echoes from the ledges,  
Mocking laughter from the hemlocks.  
Hark! It nearer comes and rattles,  
Like the hail upon the grape leaves;  
Like cold rain upon the cornfield.

Let us stroll by the river's brink and spy upon the belted kingfisher as he patiently fishes for his

breakfast. Hush! There he is, sitting motionless, like a statue, on that overhanging branch. How intently he stares into the water! He is looking for a school of small fish. Splash! He has dived into the water. Now he reappears with a shining fish in his beak, and, with a triumphant cry, bears it to his perch. It is only a small fish, so he swallows it at once, head-first. If it had been larger, he would have killed it first by giving it a few sharp raps against the tree. Besides fish, the kingfisher eats insects, crayfish, and crabs.

The belted kingfisher is more or less a solitary bird, and, except during the mating season, two birds are rarely seen together. Mr. and Mrs. Belted Kingfisher's voices are both so harsh and strident, that their calls to one another sound as though they were continually quarreling. They are quite devoted to each other, but, unlike most birds in the nesting season, seem unable to soften their voices.

The nest is built in a long winding hole which they excavate in a sandbank, preferably one that rises from a stream. At the opening in the bank the hole is about three inches in diameter, and gradually increases as it extends back some six or eight feet where it terminates in a dome-like living-room. Sometimes, when no suitable site in a sandbank can be found, the nest is built in a

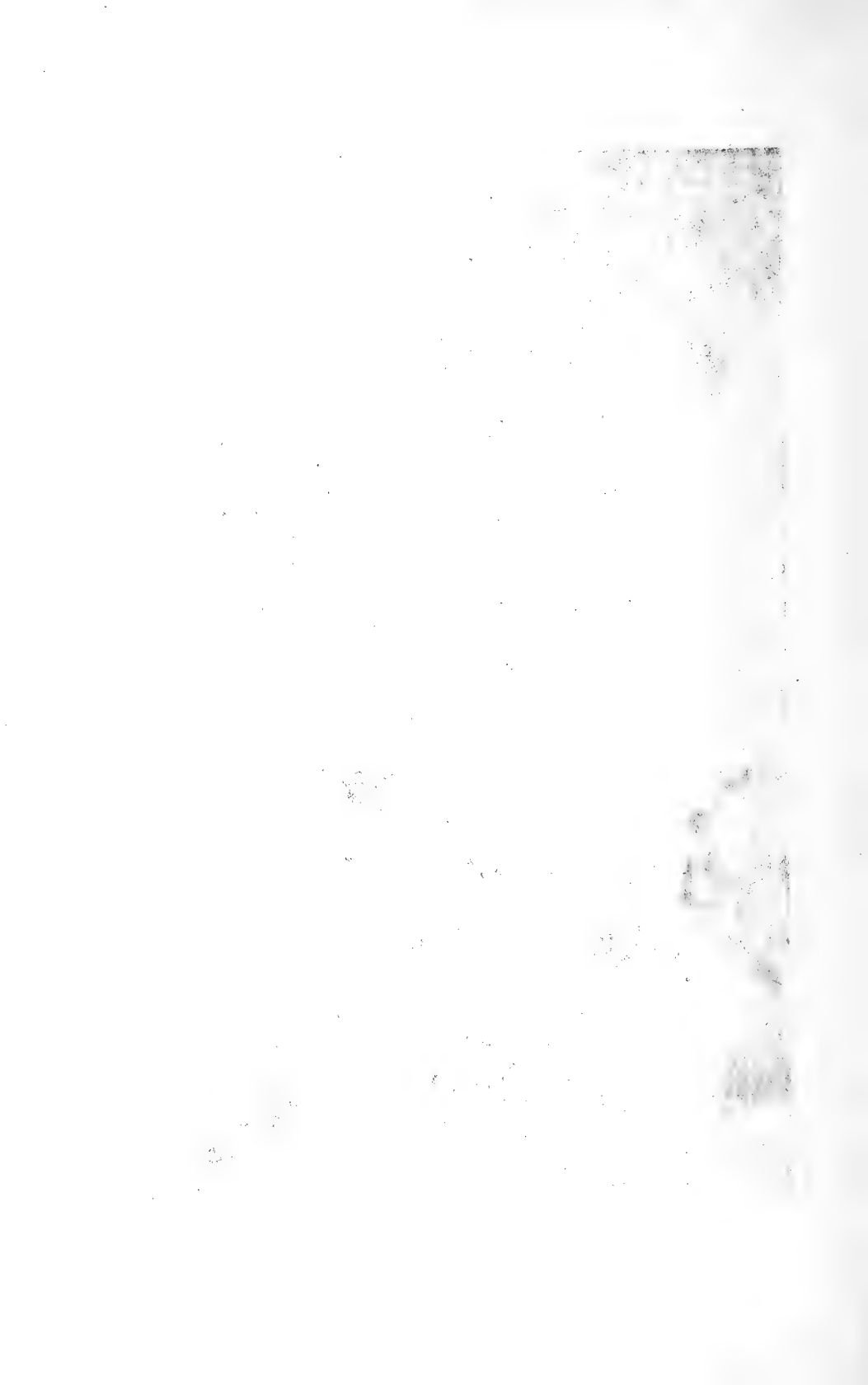


BELTED KINGFISHER

Order—COCcyGES  
Genus—CERYLE

Family—ALCEDINIDÆ  
Species—ALCYON

National Association of Audubon Societies





hollow tree. It is a queer affair, and we doubt very much if the babies find it comfortable. It is built mostly of fish bones and scales, and lined with a few scattering feathers, grass, and leaves. There are six or eight clear, shining white eggs. The young usually stay in the nest until they are fully fledged. The kingfishers are much attached to their home, which has cost them so much labor, and they return to it year after year. They have been accused of stealing the homes of water rats and making their nests therein.

The kingfisher is also called "the halcyon." Ancient myths and fables tell of a bird called the halcyon, which built a floating nest on the sea. It was said to have the mysterious power of calming the troubled waves while the young were being reared. Perhaps some of you may have heard the term "halcyon days," meaning a time of fair weather. Long ago, it was thought that the dead body of a kingfisher would keep one safe from harm in war and protect him from lightning in time of storm. Even now, in some places in France, it is said that people call the kingfisher a moth-bird and firmly believe that his body will keep moths away from woolen cloth!

The belted kingfisher is supposed to migrate in November, but if the weather is mild, he frequently stays for the winter fishing. It is said that when the time comes for migration, the

young kingfishers leave their parents and journey south alone.

“Little bird, little bird, who guides thee  
Over the land and over the sea?”

“Ah, my kind friend, God guides me  
Over the land and over the sea.”

I must tell you of my first acquaintance with the kingfisher. We were out fishing, but I grew tired of staring at the water and watching in vain for a bite, so I withdrew some distance from the bank and gave myself to the enjoyment of a book which I had brought with me. Suddenly through the woodland stillness there came a harsh, noisy rattle, and a bird alighted on an overhanging branch not far from me. I knew him at once for the kingfisher, for I had seen his picture only a few days before. He did not see me. He had eyes for nothing but the water beneath him. Suddenly he dived head first, and appeared in a moment with a struggling fish—better luck than I had found! He flew back to his perch in the tree with a triumphant cry, and smote his finny prey sharply against the branch two or three times. Soon the fish's struggles were over, but I found the kingfisher's had only just begun. Such a time as he had swallowing that fish! He gagged and writhed and tried to swallow it whole; then, regretting his haste, brought it up again,

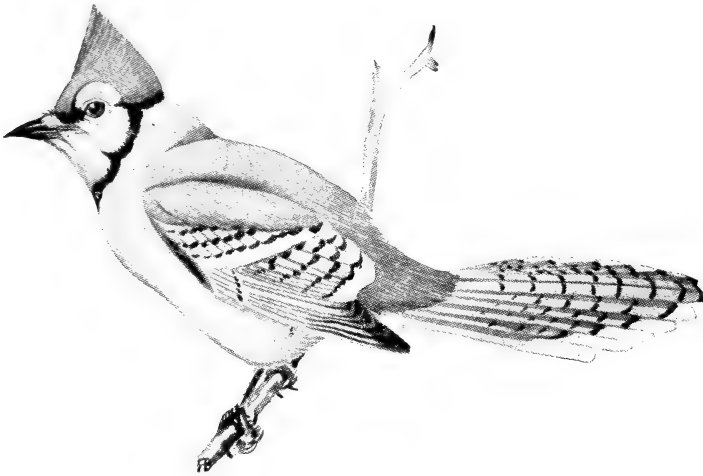
turned it around, and tried again, hoping perhaps to find a wider avenue down his throat! Evidently the scales scratched their way through, and such terrible faces as he made! It was really comical to watch him in spite of his evident distress. One could not help wondering at his love for fish, since it cost him so much to gorge it down.

## THE BLUEJAY

**A**LMOST every one knows the bluejay, but where is one that loves him? He is a cruel, inquisitive, dashing little bandit, with scarcely any traits that one can admire. He is very awkward, and his slow, heavy movements make him the clown among birds. He is a jack of all trades, handy among many things, but doing none of them exceptionally well. For instance, he can shift among the leaves on the ground searching for insects after the manner of the ground birds, or he can sit high on an old oak tree and hammer away at acorns as industriously, but not as effectively, as a woodpecker.

The jay is a scold, and loves the sound of his own voice raised in angry clatter. He has a number of calls and does a good deal in an amateur way. Some of his notes are quite pleasing to the ear, especially his whistling bell-note while mating, and his summer call of "*Linnet! Linnet!*" He loves to imitate other birds, and is especially fond of giving the hawk's cry, and watching the small birds run to cover. He has no use for a screech owl, and even the sight of one drives him into a scolding frenzy.

The bluejay is a great tease. He is as fond of mischief as a small boy. He likes to destroy things, and no creature can beat him at hiding stuff. He is in the height of his glory if he can come upon a squirrel's store of chestnuts and



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

#### BLUEJAY

A bully and bandit that one cannot help liking, despite his bad manners.

acorns, and helps himself greedily, with the utmost scorn and derision at the little furry fellow's protests. He is utterly fearless where man is concerned, and his loud "*Jay! Jay!*" particularly invites assault. Where is the school boy who has not at some time been tempted to shy a stone at the impudent little rascal? You know the old lines:

"Jay-bird, jay-bird, settin' on a limb,  
Winked at me, and I winked at him,  
I picked up a stone and split his shin,  
Now, confound you, wink ag'in!"

Few poets have been inspired to write lines about the jay. Emerson, however, defended him by saying that he probably did more good than harm, referring, no doubt, to the bird's habit of burying nuts and seeds in the ground, thus giving many a beautiful shrub and tree to the world. No bird has a finer color, or a more kingly bearing than the jay. But his beauty covers "a multitude of sins," and he is a fine symbol of the old adage, "Handsome is as handsome does."

See him over there on that tree! How his handsome blue body glints in the sun! He is a trifle larger than our friend Robin, you see, and wears a fine black band, or a collar, round his neck. His wings and tail are a beautiful blue, striped with black. Many of his feathers are tipped with white, and his under parts are a dusky white. His bill, tongue, and legs are black. On his head is a fine crest which he bears as regally as ever king wore coronet.

The jay is at his best during nesting time, or from April to September. He drops his love of noise, and, for him, preserves a silence which is truly remarkable. No doubt, he realizes that every one knows his voice, and that if he spoke

he would reveal the precious secret of the nest high in the old elm tree. This nest is a clumsy affair of sticks, rootlets, rags, grass, or any old thing, and usually contains about six olive-gray eggs spotted with brown. Mrs. Blue Jay and her mate look after it very carefully, and only sally forth occasionally to rob the nests of their peaceful neighbors, or to search for insects.

The jay eats a great many insects which are harmful to vegetation. He stays with us all the year, and, in spite of some of his ugly traits, we are glad that he does, for we should certainly miss his rousing call and his handsome color, which holds our admiration as a bit of blue sky dropped from above. When we consider the jay's industry in planting nuts, his fondness for noxious insects, and his careful attention to parental duties, we feel that he may have been too heavily weighed in the balance. A bird so exquisite in plumage must have some redeeming qualities. As Riley says:

Mr. Bluejay, full o' sass,  
In them baseball clothes of his,  
Sportin' round the orchard jes'  
Like he owned the premises.

## THE SPARROW FAMILY

**E**VERY one knows the sparrow. But alas! the audacious little English sparrow has so clouded the family name that even the mention of "sparrow" to those ignorant of the many delightful members of this family produces a shudder of disgust. Isn't it a pity that we did not have bird immigration laws back in the seventies? Then the misguided citizens of New York who imported English sparrows to kill the insects which were destroying their shade trees would have been prevented. Under our present laws no birds, excepting canaries and parrots, can be brought in without the consent of the chief of the Game Preservation Division of the Department of Agriculture. And you may be very sure he is particular to bar nuisances of any kind!

The sparrow has figured in history and tradition since the beginning of time. We are told that it was the sparrow that warned Eve not to eat of the forbidden fruit. It was a sparrow, you remember, who shot the bridegroom, Cock Robin, and so covered himself with shame and disgrace. In the story of Joseph, we read how the spar-



rows ate the bread from the top basket, which the chief baker dreamed he carried on his head to the king. Perhaps the Bible does not really say that the bird was a sparrow, but what bird is there that is more friendly with the baker, or more likely to creep through the crevices in a wicker basket? Indeed, it is the chief delight of the sparrows to creep in and out of niches and crevices. In Scotland, many of the cotters leave little places in the thatched roof for the accommodation of these birds.

There are about forty kinds of sparrows in the United States, though usually not more than five varieties are to be found in any one locality. The sparrow belongs to the largest of the bird families, and is own cousin to the finches, the grosbeaks, the buntings, the linnets, and the crossbills. True, there is little family resemblance between some of these birds, yet all have certain marks which show their kinship. For instance, all have short, stout, conical bills suited to cracking seeds. They are seed-sowers and weed-warriors. Nearly all of them are fine songsters.

"Sparrow" means "flutterer," in old English. The sparrows are birds of the ground, or not far from it, and Nature has dressed them in somber colors that protect them from cats and other enemies. As the little grayish-brown birds run along the ground, they look so much like Mother

Earth that we are likely to pass them unnoticed,—that is, unless our eyes have “been opened” so that we are always looking for birds. Sparrows destroy a great many insects during the year, but their chief diet is weed seeds. No birds are more valuable to the farmer and gardener. Five of this interesting family may be met almost any day. They are the song sparrow, the field sparrow, the vesper sparrow, the fox sparrow, and the chipping sparrow.

*THE SONG SPARROW*

Sunshine set to music!  
 Hear the sparrow sing!  
 In his note the freshness  
 Of the new-born spring.  
 In his trill delicious  
 Summer overflows—  
 Whiteness of the lily.  
 Sweetness of the rose.

—*Lucy Larcom.*

This is the song sparrow! He is the dearest of the sparrow flock. You must learn to know him; he is a sure cure for a broken head, a stubbed toe, or the sorriest case of “the blues.” Early in the morning, when the sun is “boiling hot” at noon time, in the cool of evening, just any time you can hear him singing.

Mr. and Mrs. Song Sparrow are dressed exactly alike in plain coats of brownish-gray, heav-

ily streaked, dotted, and striped with many shades of brown and lilac. There is a black spot on the breast and the wings and tail are plain grayish-brown. They are about six inches long. When running around, they have a cute way of



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

#### SONG SPARROW

His silver tongue is a sure cure for the blues.

sticking their tails straight up, just like a wren. They straddle their little stick legs wide apart and spread their toes in such a funny way! It makes one smile to watch them. While flying, they have a habit of pumping their tails. It seems to make them go faster.

The song sparrow is not a bold bird, but he always chooses some conspicuous perch while

singing. He is called the bird with the silver tongue. Many people have tried to put words to his music, and none of them have put the same thing! But of course, no two of them heard the same sparrow. Imagine two people always saying the same thing! Girls in Massachusetts say that the song sparrow says: "Maids, maids, maids, hang on your teakettle, tea-kettle-ettle-ettle!" What have you heard him say?

Often he sings while flying, and then his song is longer. He and his cousin, the vesper sparrow, are the only ones of their family that sing while on the wing, and the vesper sparrow does not do it very much. The song sparrow's call-note is a sharp little "*chip, chip.*"

Mrs. Song Sparrow's nest is made of dry grasses, bits of bark, and horse hair, cleverly concealed in a clump of grass. There are usually four or five grayish-white eggs, all clouded and speckled with lavender and brown. Sometimes as many as three sets of birdies are brought off in a summer. And such work as they do make! But then they eat just anything, and they soon get big enough to help. It is fun to see the old birds get food for their babies. They always pick up a whole mouthful at a time. And they always want to carry more! They go with their mouths so full that bits stick out all around! And sometimes these little bits are insects that

wriggle out and slip away. What tales they must have to tell their friends!

The song sparrow is known throughout the United States, though it differs slightly in color in the various localities. In many States it remains all the winter, a cheery little chap even when the snow is falling, and a welcome comrade of the chickadees. Winter quarters are from southern Illinois and Massachusetts to the Gulf.

#### *THE FIELD SPARROW*

The field sparrow loves the field and brushy pasture lands. He is very shy, but I am quite sure you have seen him flitting from bush to bush, just a little way ahead of you all the time, and coaxing you on with a little snatch of song.

The field sparrow is frequently mistaken for the chipping sparrow or the vesper sparrow. But there is no need for this. He has some marks that are all his own. To begin with, he has a more reddish-brown back than any of the small sparrows. He has a chestnut crown (so has the chipping sparrow) but the field sparrow has a red bill, while the chipping sparrow's bill is black. His song is much like the vesper sparrow's. But watch him. If he flies shyly away as you come near, and you cannot see any white tail quills, you may know he is the field sparrow,

for the vesper sparrow shows the "white feather" very plainly when he flies.

The field sparrow usually nests in the bushes, and for this reason is often called the bush sparrow. About three broods are raised during the nesting season, which lasts from May well into July. The eggs are from three to five in number and vary in color and markings, sometimes the greenish-white color is relieved by reddish spots, again they are almost plain. The field sparrows arrive early in April, and leave in November, ranging from the British provinces to the Gulf and westward to the plains. They winter from Illinois and Virginia southward. They are not quite so large as the song-sparrow.

#### *THE VESPER SPARROW*

The vesper sparrow is a bird of the country road-side and brushy clearings. He has been called the bird with a message from heaven. He is a twilight singer, most familiar at evening-time, because few people get up early enough to hear him in "the twilight of early dawning." His song resembles that of the song sparrow, but he begins with one low note followed by two higher ones, while the song sparrow begins with three notes all of the same kind. He prefers the top of the fence when executing his best music. Dr. Chapman says: "He cannot, like many birds,

sing between mouthfuls, but ascending to his perch he gives perhaps half an hour entirely to music, resting motionless between the intervals of each song."

The vesper sparrow is a grass bird. He eats and sleeps and rears his young amid its kindly screening tendrils. In some communities, he is known as the grass finch. In others, he is called the bay-winged bunting. This name is given him because of his reddish-brown wing coverts. He is especially common in eastern parts of North America from Hudson Bay to the Gulf. Winter quarters are south of Virginia. He is about the same size as his cousin, the field sparrow.

#### *THE FOX SPARROW*

The fox sparrow is the largest, plumpest, and reddest of all the sparrows. Because of the reddish-brown arrow-heads which mark his breast and sides, he is sometimes mistaken for the hermit thrush. However, a glance at his short, stout bill would at once identify him as a member of the finch family. In some localities, he is called the foxy finch. Just why the term "fox" came to be applied to him, is hard to say, for he certainly has none of his namesake's malicious cunning. Doubtless, it is because of his "fox-red" coat.

The fox sparrows arrive early in March and they bring with them a wealth of Spring melody which sends thrills of pleasure through the listeners. Mr. Fox Sparrow carries the banner for being the finest songster in the Sparrow Family. Blanchan says: "His full, rich, luscious tones, with just a tinge of plaintiveness in them, are poured forth with spontaneous abandon which is enough to summon anybody with a musical ear out of door under the leaden skies to where the delicious notes issue from the leafless shrubbery by the roadside."

He delights to scratch around among the dead leaves in a thicket in search of insects to piece out his usual diet of seeds. He contrives to scratch with both feet at once, a trick which would doubtless surprise old Biddy, if she could but catch him at it. He loves company and is usually found with a flock of comrades. The nests are built quite near together in the grassy pastures and meadows, under the very noses of the cattle and sheep. No doubt old Spotty and old Brindle could tell all sorts of cute things about the little bird babies, if they could only speak. Probably they often laugh over them till their sides ache!

The fox sparrows are among the first birds to come, and the last to go. They travel southward in small flocks. Often their cousins, the



white-throated sparrows, go with them. Winter quarters are south of Illinois and Virginia.

### THE CHIPPING SPARROW

The chipping sparrow is a very humble, unassuming little neighbor, familiar to every one from Newfoundland to the Gulf, and westward to the Rockies. Each section of country has a name for him; one calls him chip bird, another names him social sparrow, and still another calls him hair bird. The latter name is given him because he uses so much hair in the construction of his nest. It is a title which many birds might share with equal right!

The chipping sparrow is often called "a bird of one talent," because he has only one high, wiry trill, *chip, chip*, like the buzzing of a locust, which he makes serve for every occasion. He is a very cheerful little chap, and does not seem to mind his lack of musical ability. Indeed, it is doubtful if he knows it! He never keeps still long enough to find out what the other birds are singing.

The male chippy is sometimes mistaken for the field sparrow on account of his chestnut crown. A glance at his bill would settle the question, for the chipping sparrow has a black bill, while the field sparrow's is red. The chipping sparrow also has more gray mixed in its chestnut and brown coat. The wings and tail are dusky

brown. Mrs. Chippy, unlike her mate, has a crown streaked with black. Her bill is brownish.

The chipping sparrow departs from the usual sparrow fashion, by nesting frequently in high



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

#### CHIPPING SPARROW

The chummy little "Chippy" of the roadside.

trees, though he does not despise a low bush in the garden. The eggs are speckled greenish-blue. These birds are supposed to migrate in October, though often during a mild winter some of them remain. Winter quarters are in the Gulf States and Mexico.

#### THE CANADA SPARROW

There is a larger edition of the chipping sparrow present with us in the winter. We call him the winter chippy, but he is known at the North,

where he nests, as the Canada Sparrow. Some misguided ornithologist of our own land named him the tree sparrow. Though why he did so is a mystery. They seem to care nothing for trees, excepting the evergreen, which they use for shelter at night and during storms. An old weed stalk, whose seed pods are well filled, is their delight. They are brisk, twittering little fellows, with an oft repeated call which sounds much like "*Too-lā-it! too-lā-it!*"

#### THE ENGLISH SPARROW

"*Cheep! Cheep! Cheep!*" Every one knows the cry, now plaintive and querulous, now saucy and pugnacious, and many people consider the English sparrow as an even cheaper fellow than he proclaims himself. He is a wicked little chap with a nasty temper and so many disagreeable habits, that it is not to be wondered at that some people almost hate the name "sparrow." You know his gray crown, bordered by a reddish-brown stripe just over the eye, and the black spot on his breast. The female is dressed in dull grays without the chestnut markings and black spots and is slightly smaller than the male.

You know them both, of course, and very probably you do not know anything good about them, either, do you? But truly the English sparrow is more sinned against than sinning. We dub

him a "little ruffian in feathers," and we have no patience with his quarrelsome, thieving habits. Boys especially delight in shying stones at him, and in making him the target for their air-rifles. And they have reason: his presence about our homes drives away more desirable bird neighbors. For no self-respecting bird will associate with him, and no feathered songster's nest is safe in his vicinity. He is a house-breaker and a cannibal, and likes on occasion to make a meal of his neighbors' eggs and babies. Nor will he eat caterpillars and beetles,—food which all good birds should devour with vim. He rouses our ire by his tireless determination and persistence to build his bulky nest in our porches, and in every odd corner and cranny about the building. And such a host of sticks and grasses as one pair of these pests can carry in an hour! [Also, the English sparrow is on the black list of the farmers, gardeners and orchard men. They say he does considerable damage to growing crops and to grain in the shock or bin. And we must own that this is true.

But black as his record is, the English sparrow has one redeeming feature which may outweigh some of his faults. He is an industrious little scavenger of our cities and villages. We find him always in the dirtiest, most unsanitary places. Indeed, a trip down an unkept alley where refuse

is found will prove beyond a doubt that such a place is his common eating ground. Here in the grime and the filth the common house fly breeds by the million. And here in the very thickest of the larvæ works the English sparrow, gobbling up the flies in all their stages of growth.

"His destruction of this pest alone," says one who pleads his cause, "will more than overbalance, from the standpoint of health, all the harm that he may do in minor ways. It may be safely said that one sparrow is worth many hundred sheets of 'fly paper.' After considering carefully all his habits, we will have to conclude that he increases manifold the sanitary conditions by destroying decaying animal and vegetable matter. He is to refuse matter, flies and many larvæ what boiling water is to any form of bacteria or germs."

The English sparrow, as his name indicates, came to us from England. About seventy years ago a few pairs were brought over seas and liberated in our land, under the mistaken idea that they would aid in destroying the hosts of caterpillars and beetles which were then waging a war all their own. Of course, the doughty little English "fighters" utterly refused to take a hand. But they did not mope and pine. They settled down quietly to adapt their hardy little selves to their new surroundings, and they succeeded

so well that in a few years our government was forced to consider seriously "the English sparrow pest."

No birds multiply more swiftly than these "audacious little gamins." Indeed, a bulletin issued by the Department of Agriculture shows that the offspring of a single pair of English sparrows might easily amount to upwards of two hundred and eighty billion birds in ten years!

## THE FINCHES

**T**HE Finch family is the Smith family of birddom. Indeed, so numerous is it, that it comprises about one-seventh of the bird world. It has almost seemed as though any bird were called "a finch," when it didn't seem to claim kin anywhere else. The Finch tribe includes all the sparrows, the redpolls and crossbills, the merry little goldfinch, our entrancing grosbeak songsters, the buntings, the juncos, snowflakes, and chewinks.

In this book we have not tried to keep all the Finch kin together, but have divided them into groups, for ease of reference. But there are two or three Finches that we can become acquainted with here.

### *THE GOLDFINCH*

The goldfinch has been given a variety of names, chief among them being that of thistle bird and yellowbird. He is a bright, cheery, sociable fellow and loves the orchard and the lawn, but a row of sunflowers or an old field overgrown with mullen and thistle is a paradise to him. The male is bright yellow with a black

crown, frontlet, wings and tail. His little mate is brownish-olive above and yellowish-white beneath. Perhaps you may have seen them daintily picking a lunch from the fluffy seeds of the thistle blossoms. They are stocky little birds about five inches long.

There is an old fable about the origin of the goldfinch. It is said that a hemlock and the wind loved a sunbeam. She was afraid of the wind because he was so wild and boisterous, and so hid in the cool shade near the heart of the hemlock. The wind came with great force and tore her away and many shadows came with her. The sun was sorry for his little child and pitied her grief at being taken from the hemlock. "She shall be free," he said. So he changed the little sunbeam into a beautiful yellow bird and wove it a crown and tinged its wings and tail with the black shadows. Then the bird flew away to the hemlock and when the wind came sighing and singing softly and begging to be forgiven, it not only forgave, but learned the wind's delicious, dreamy love song to sing when it went wooing a mate of its own.

The goldfinch is a gay cavalier and courts his mate long and joyously. His song is wild and sweet, a very rapture of happiness, and he sings it until about the first of September, or until the busy care of his family sobers and quiets him.



The birds are very sociable and in early summer are usually to be found in flocks. When nesting, they like to build near each other, and the gentlemen seem to have clubs which they attend quite regularly while the ladies are busy with household cares. They meet and fly airily over the tree tops, or assemble and sing their very best love songs for the benefit of their listening mates, and sometimes fly away to a nearby pool to have a merry, refreshing splash. The goldfinch flies with a long, bounding, graceful, dipping motion, very pleasing to watch. They twitter incessantly while on the wing.

Sometimes the goldfinch's nest is not even made until many other birds are preparing to fly away to the south. They set up housekeeping late because of the food supply which is most plentiful at this time, and which makes the labor of feeding the hungry brood easier. Madame Goldfinch is a very skillful architect. She chooses a crotch in a fruit, or shade tree, about twenty feet from the ground, and usually near a dwelling. Here she securely mats and weaves a broad brimmed, deeply hollowed nest of vegetable down and plant fibers and lines it with a plentiful supply of thistle down. She lays from four to six pale-blue eggs, and sits on them for a period of two weeks.

In the late fall, the goldfinch changes his gay

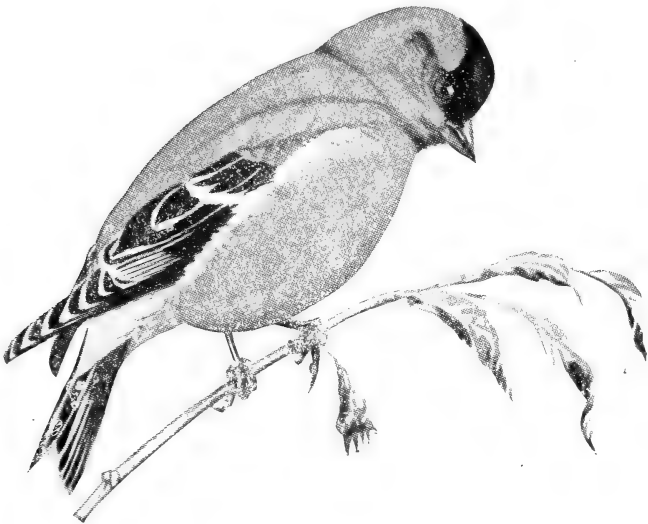
summer suit, which has become considerably faded and worn by his late arduous duties, and comes forth in such a sober Puritan dress that even his old friends do not know him. He is a combination of reddish-drab and soiled brownish-white with faint yellow head. But he has not lost his cheerful, sunny disposition, and picks out a neglected corner of the old garden for a winter home. Here when the snow lies deepest he may be seen flitting happily about the seed-laden weeds, searching for his meager dinner and calling out a cheery "ker-chee, chee, chee."

The goldfinch is an ideal bird citizen. He is loyal and independent. His merry ways and sweet disposition are good antidotes for discontent. He is invaluable to mankind because of his great service in destroying the seeds of noxious plants, such as the dandelion, thistle, and pig weed. He is one of the most beautiful and charming of all our bird neighbors.

Indeed, Mr. and Mrs. Goldfinch are singularly happy little birds, and everywhere they carry sunshine as bright as their own little breasts, thus fulfilling the request of Mother Nature that they give freely to the world of their golden glory. As they flit through the air their song is as sweet as any caged canary's. It is a fitting accompaniment of blossom time and Maying

days. And oh how joyous the song, when the little ones arrive! There are some who insist that the proud father calls "baby! ba-bee!" in a perfect ecstasy.

"When he flies in the blue sky he seems like a visible laugh, for nobody can see the dash he makes and not smile. Many a breaking heart



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

GOLDFINCH

A dashing little fellow with a fine canary-like song.

has been made less sad by sight of him," says one observer. It would be hard indeed to keep from feeling more cheerful after meeting the bright flash of wing, and hearing the pleasing note of the goldfinch.

No bird of North America has a more extensive range than the goldfinch. It nests from the Gulf States to the fur countries, migrating in May and September. Winter quarters are in the southern part of our country, but if the weather is too severe they journey into South America, traveling in twos and threes, or in flocks, as fancy suits, often flying at night and feeding by day.

#### *THE PURPLE FINCH*

If your home is in the Middle or New England states, or perchance in the great pine belt of our Western section, no doubt the purple finch is as familiar to you as the robin. Perched in the tall top of a spreading elm or shadowy spruce, his gay raspberry-colored suit glints with purplish tints, and his throat swells with a burst of melody that seems to defy all competition. Surely never was there a finer bird! And so confident is he of this fact that you may come quite near to attend his concert. Ravishingly sweet and mellow it is, with little trills and warbles like the canary, gradually rising and growing into a fine crescendo of love and happiness. And if, mayhap, there is a little grayish-olive sweetheart hiding somewhere beneath the leaves, all the art of harmony seems his to command. A joyous, living music-box he is in very truth, and it is im-

possible for his little lady-love to resist a suitor so handsomely dressed, so ardent and tender, and so deliciously melodious.



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

PURPLE FINCH

A joyous living music-box he is in very truth.

Soon there is a flat, grassy nest, lined with horsehair, in the hedge or in some low garden tree, and the purple songster fairly bubbles with

happiness as one by one five green eggs make up its furnishings. The mother bird has a gentle confidence in all mankind, perhaps because her spouse is so fearless and free. If you are careful, you may go near enough almost to touch her before she takes alarm, and once off she is no nervous scatter-brain. She feels sure you mean no harm. Probably she has never seen caged purple finches, or if she has their common name of purple linnet deceives her. She does not dream these beautiful singers are her own kin, taken from the nest when young and reared in captivity!

Sometimes the adult male birds are captured and put in cages. But they usually prove a disappointment. Sick with sorrow at their lot, the birds moult into the dull color of the females and pine in silence, from which they rouse only to peck rebelliously at the hand which seeks to tame them.

Baby male purple finches are not purple at all. Until their second year they wear sober sparrowy-fashioned suits like their mother. It is easy enough, however, to know them from their sparrow cousins by their heavy, rounded bills, tufted with feathers at the base, and by their forked tails.

The finches are devoted parents. But their duties are over by the first of October, and they

join groups of their kin for gay picnic parties in the distant orchards and woods. Gone now is their joyous song, but yet the males are seldom silent. They keep up a little low warble, as though humming happily to themselves, while they range about in search of food.

Many people have the notion that these birds do considerable damage to fruit blossoms and leaf buds. The truth is, however, that insects and seeds constitute their food in summer, and berries in winter. It is only when reduced to necessity that they feed upon the buds, and then those which are sweet and sticky, like the elm and the young willow capsules, are their favorites. They do eat greedily of the stamens in beech and fruit-tree blossoms. But surely to a neighbor so sweet and interesting we may spare some of these without grudging! The birds are fond, too, of sun-flower and other oily seeds, and they are often found making a happy lunch in the fall garden.

#### *THE CHEWINK*

The chewink is a bird which really should have more lengthy mention in our book, and perhaps no place is more fitting than here with its near kin, the purple finches. The chewink frequents the borders of sloughs and brushy pastures, and at first note, you might perhaps mistake this in-

dustrious little grubber for a robin. Indeed, ground robin is its most common name. But, if you look closely, you will see that it is smaller and darker in color than our familiar garden friend, with black in its coat instead of tawny brown, and with the bill and general carriage of the finch.

The female is smaller than her happy, rich-voiced spouse. She builds her nest in a sunken place on the ground, and then foolishly hides it with twigs and leaves to the peril of the dusty white speckled eggs and the helpless fledglings which are often crushed beneath even the most careful foot.

When frightened, the chewink rises from the ground with an odd little call, *towhick, to-whick, to-whee!* In some localities this call note gives to the bird the name of towhee bunting. In the far South a white-eyed species is called the grasel, and it is alas! much fancied as a "pleasant dish to set before the king."

#### THE INDIGO BUNTING

The indigo bunting, or indigo bird, is a cousin to the sparrows and has many sparrow-like traits. Indeed, he has a sparrow-like wife! If you should chance to see her in the bushes, nine times out of ten you would pass her by as a sparrow, without ever noticing the blue glint of her



shoulders and tail. But not so her mate! You could not pass him without instantly recognizing him and pausing to admire his beautiful deep blue color, which glints almost to green in the sunlight. He is called "the blue air-flower." There is a pretty legend about him which some one has aptly told in the following lines:

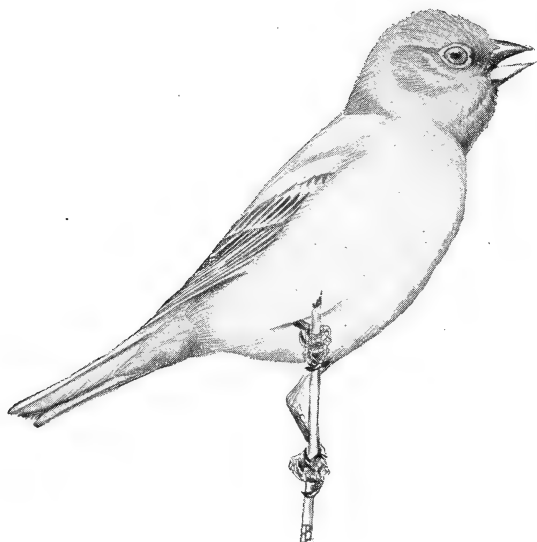
When Mother Nature with planting was through,  
There was left of Spring's own color *blue*  
Enough to fashion a flower, whose hue  
Should be richer than all, and as fair;  
So she tossed the bright flower high up in the air,  
Saying: "So many blue flowers grow everywhere,  
Let this pretty one be a bird!"

In the fall the indigo bunting wears a traveling coat as dull as his mate's. They winter in Central America and Mexico, coming back to us in May. All through the summer, even in the heat of the longest August days, the male bird sings his sweet songs. He has a fashion of launching into a grand chorus and then dwindling down until his hearers speculate as to whether he has neglected to breathe deeply, or has changed his mind, or has just felt too lazy to finish! Almost any day, dwellers in the Eastern States may meet him in the garden, the clover field, by the roadside, and in the woodland clearing—anywhere, in fact, where there are plenty of small insects and seeds. In Iowa, the indigo bird is a rare oc-

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currence, but we have met him a few times in country rambles.

Mrs. Indigo is never very much in evidence. While her mate is perched on a telegraph pole, or some high vantage point, singing all the long



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

INDIGO BUNTING

Like a blue flower which was given wings and tossed into the sky.

day through, she is carefully attending to her household duties in some screening thicket. She attracts no attention; her dusky color and quiet manner never draws any one to her carefully hidden nest. Her husband, too, is most discreet. He often visits the nest to see how matters are

progressing, but so stealthily that no one could follow him.

The nest is built of grass, leaves, downy seeds, and fine roots, and lined with fine grass and hair. It is usually placed near the ground in low bushes or weeds, a favorite location being in an old brushy pasture. If in a bush, the nest is securely placed in a crotch; if built in the weeds, it is carefully hung from the stem with no support beneath. Four or five light blue eggs, splotched on the larger end with purple, are objects of special care. The eggs are hatched in ten days, and in a surprisingly short time the little birdies are ready to leave the nest and hide away among the tangled vines and bushes.

## THE GROSBEAKS

**T**HE grosbeaks are among our most delightful bird friends. They belong to the great Finch family, and are cousins of the sparrows. They have gay coats and beautiful voices, and everybody who knows them loves them. There are five branches in the family tree, but we shall introduce you to but two of these—the cardinal grosbeak, or Virginian nightingale, and the rose-breasted grosbeak.

### *THE CARDINAL*

The cardinal is the most gorgeous member of his family, and his great crest proclaims him king of the clan, or prince of the woodland church. His coat is such a brilliant red that it is almost scarlet. He is nearly nine inches long. He wears a funny patch of black on his face, that looks for all the world like a mask. Some people say that it is one, and of course, there is a story about it! It seems that a long time ago the cardinals had gray faces and gray bills. But they used to steal currants from a helpless old man who lived up in the mountains. He begged the gods to help him, and they punished the birds



CARDINAL

Order—PASSERES

Family—FRINGILLIDÆ

Genus—CARDINALIS

Species—CARDINALIS

National Association of Audubon Societies



by dyeing their beaks red and staining their faces black! This was not very much of a punishment, but it satisfied the old man. He thought the birds would bear their badge of punishment for life, and they have. But, no doubt, they have done a great deal of twittering about it! You see now they can steal berries and no one be a whit the wiser, for the stain does not show!

My acquaintance with the cardinal grosbeak began long ago, when my uncle, on returning from a trip to the Southland, brought two red birds in a cage to his little daughter.

"They are Virginia nightingales," he explained, "and the most delightful singers. The boy who sold them to me said they took kindly to captivity. I hope you may enjoy them as much as I have their kin for the past six weeks. You have often wished for a canary, and I thought these would be much nicer. All your little friends will be wanting you to raise them a pair, and they will make lovely birthday and Christmas gifts."

Splendid! I was to have the first birdies, and most bountifully did we provide nest-building material. But the birds did not deign to notice it! We were in despair. Of what did they build anyway? Uncle did not know, and there was no wealth of bird books then to supply information. So finally we made a nest ourselves and fastened

it securely in the cage—a nest which should have delighted any bird's heart.

But our birds did not care for it. Indeed, it seemed to make them despondent. They began to droop and were far from the happy birds we expected them to be. Finally the smallest one, the one we thought was the female, died. We had a very weepy funeral, and then called uncle for council. Could we not send South for a mate for Cardy—one that he might like better?

Uncle shook his head discouragingly. He did not know where to send, he had not kept the boy's address, the birds were expensive, and anyway he doubted if the lad's information had been correct. The birds had been so different from those he had admired. He thought we had better let Cardy go. No doubt he would make his home in the garden and be much happier.

So we hung the cage in the topmost boughs of an apple tree and opened wide the door. How happy Cardy was when he discovered his freedom! How gleefully his rich, high-whistled *cheo-cheo-cheo-cheo* rang out! We listened in delight, and all the birdies round gathered and stared in amazement. From whence had come this gay-colored stranger? The catbirds got real fussy and screamed with envy, and we were forced to shy rocks at a couple of kingbirds who showed fight.



On the third morning Cardy was gone. Probably that Unseen Presence which guides little birds whispered to him that far away to the south was a little mate longing for him. I have often wondered about him, and about the boy who caged him. Did he know and do you know what I learned years later—that we had two poor, lonesome bachelor birds paired? No wonder the sight of that nest made them sad!

The female redbird, or cardinal grosbeak, is not red at all. She is a yellowish-brown, sparrowy bird, and in nesting time you have to look sharp to find her. The favorite nesting site is in a holly, laurel, or other evergreen shrub, near a field of grain or a berry patch. There are two or three pale-gray, brown-marked eggs in the loose, bulky nest. Baby red birds are not red either; they look like their mother. They are safer in somber colorings.

Mr. and Mrs. Cardinal are both singers. Mrs. Cardinal has a soft voice, clear and sweet as a tiny silver bell. The male bird's song is a clear, loud whistle. These birds are seldom seen north of the Ohio River. In the latitude of Arkansas they are resident birds, coming close about the house in winter. Can you imagine anything more cheery on a gloomy day than a couple of redbirds in a cedar tree? They seem to lighten up the whole landscape.

*THE ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK*

The rose-breasted grosbeak is a bird of the garden—if the garden happens to be north of the Ohio River and east of Kansas and Nebraska. He is a beautiful songster, and one of the few birds that sing at night. He seems to love to warble softly to himself in the bright moonlight.

This grosbeak is a trifle larger than his cousin, cardinal. He wears a coat of white and black which is somber enough. But oh, the handsome rose-colored shield on his breast and his pretty rose-colored wing linings! There is a story about these. It seems that a much loved robin died, and for some reason it was necessary to have the funeral after dark. But no bird could be found to sing. They all said the night air hurt their throats, and they positively could not make a sound. Then some one thought of the grosbeak, and a messenger was hurried for him. He came at once and sang most feelingly, touching the hearts of all his hearers save one, a wicked night owl, who had slipped in among the mourners. This jealous creature grabbed the poor grosbeak by the breast, just as the last note left his throat, and tore out a whole handful of feathers!

Imagine what a scene there was! The poor birdies were all frightened half out of their wits. They cried and screamed until a couple of king-

bird watchmen came hurrying up. These brave fellows flew at the old owl, beak and claw, and he was driven off in a great hurry. Then they hastened down to the garden and brought up great beakfuls of rose petals. These they plastered all over the poor grosbeak's wounded breast and torn wing linings. Just then a fairy came up out of the dell. She was so pleased with the grosbeak's gay appearance, that she waved her wand and declared that he should wear the rose colors forevermore.

Mrs. Rose-breast is soberly dressed in a brownish, sparrow-like costume, with light yellow wing-linings. She has a heavy brown beak. When any danger threatens she hides among the leafy branches and leaves her brave spouse to protect the home as well as he can. The nest is a coarse, rude affair built in a thorn bush or low tree. Both birds help to make it, and after the three or four eggs are laid, Mr. Grosbeak takes his turn at the hatching-out process. When not lightening his little wife's burdens by occupying the nest, he hovers near and cheers her with rapturous outbursts of song. He has a very amiable and happy disposition and never quarrels or meddles, though he is quick to defend his own rights. A friend says that he is just as quick to defend his neighbor's home as his own, and tells the following story as proof. Two bird families, the

robin and the grosbeak, nested in a neighborly fashion in an apple tree near his window. One day when the robins were away and the grosbeak was singing sweetly to his brooding mate, a thieving jay sneaked through the branches and began to pillage the robin's home. The song died on the grosbeak's lips, and he attacked Mr. Jay tooth and nail, fairly making the blue feathers fly, until the thief flew away, screaming with terror.

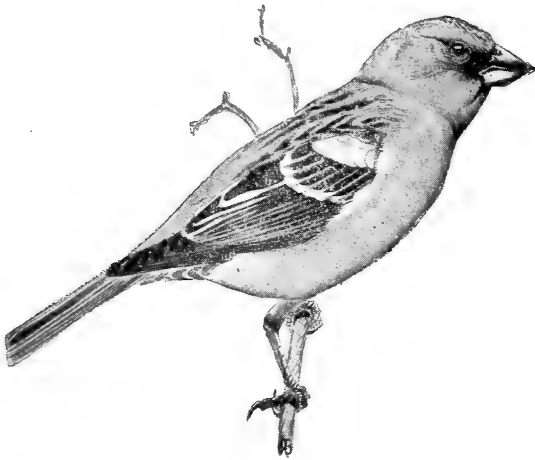
In some communities the rose-breasted grosbeak is called the potato-bug bird, on account of his love for this pest. He is also fond of many other noxious insects. The vegetable diet is made up of seeds and the buds and blossoms of forest trees. The only charge that can be brought against him is that he is fond of stealing green peas. But surely he helps the gardener enough to more than pay for the peas, and if he didn't, who would not give him all the peas he could eat in exchange for the glorious songs that he sings?

Of all the bird neighbors in our northern garden, I think we liked the rose-breast best. He gave us some beautiful evening songs. Indeed, he sang almost all the time, until after the second lot of birdies were hatched. And we could always hear his voice high above the voices of all the other birds. Sometimes we used to think that

he and the Baltimore oriole were trying to see which could out do the other!

*THE BLUE GROSBEAK*

Down South they have another member of the Grosbeak family—the blue grosbeak, familiarly known as “blue pop.” Occasionally he wanders



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

BLUE GROSBEAK

The “country cousin” of the Grosbeak family.

north along the Atlantic Coast, as far as Maine; but mostly he stays around the Gulf. He finds better pickings there.

He is of so dark a shade of blue as almost to be black—the wings and tail especially dark and tipped with cinnamon. He is nearly eight inches long.

The blue grosbeak is not so well-known as his relatives. He may be called their country cousin, keeping house very quietly in remote places. Even his song is a weaker effort than that of Cousin Rosebreast. But he is a useful member of society, nevertheless, eating large quantities of injurious insects.



ROSE BREASTED GROSBEAK  
(UPPER FIGURE, FEMALE; LOWER FIGURE, MALE)

Order—PASSERES

Family—FRINGILLIDÆ

Genus—ZAMELODIA

Species—LUDOVICIANA

National Association of Audubon Societies





## THE BLACKBIRD FAMILY

“**B**LACKBIRDS!” you say. “Hmm! *Blackbirds!*” and you are about to pass this chapter by. But don’t do it! Why, my dear, the blackbird family includes some of our most interesting bird friends. The meadow-lark, the oriole, and the bobolink belong in the family tree. So, too, does that ill-famed bird of the pastures, the cowbird. He is the black sheep of the family. But, black as he has been painted, there is considerable good about him. We shall tell you about this later.

The blackbird family forms the connecting link between the crows and the finches. With the exception of the meadow-lark, the male birds have either black plumage, or some brilliant color combined with black, for summer wear. The females are dressed differently. The blackbird family are ground-gleaners, and, therefore, have good strong feet. Their diet consists of seeds and insects. The bobolink and cowbird feed almost wholly upon seeds, and their conical bills are shorter than those of the insect-loving members of the family. Now let us talk about some of these birds.

*THE GRACKLE*

This is the right name for the true blackbird. There are two kinds—the bronzed and purple grackles. They are large birds—larger than the robin—and sometimes are over a foot long. They are so well known that they scarcely need an introduction. However, sometimes one species is confused with the other. The purple grackle, or crow blackbird, is dressed in a “changeable” black suit in which blue, green, copper, and metallic violet tints prevail in bars. He has a bright yellow eye, and tail much longer than his wings. The bronzed grackle, as his name indicates, differs from his cousin in plumage, being a beautiful bronzed-black, without bars. They are much alike in habits. The bronzed grackle has a harsher, louder call note than the purple grackle, and is a more westerly bird. You know Lowell says:

“Fust come the blackbirds clatterin’ in tall trees  
And settlin’ things in windy Congresses;  
Queer politicians, though, for I’ll be skinned  
If all on ’em don’t head agin’ the wind!”

What a noise they make! Every one knows their cracked, wheezy whistle, when a whole flock of them gathers in the tree top and tries to forget that they are close kin to the crow and to sing like

other birds. The blackbirds migrate in great flocks, sometimes numbering thousands. They are among the first to come in early spring, and there is something decidedly cheerful about their "wheel-barrow chorus," as some one has dubbed their efforts at song.

A wise person who knows a great deal about all sorts of birds says that the blackbirds not only have congresses, and social meetings where each one prattles his best story, sings his best song, and makes his best speech, but that they often have a trial by jury. He says that he once watched a flock of blackbirds try three prisoners. He did not know what the rascals had done. But it must have been something very mean. Because you know the blackbirds think it is all right for members of their family to steal corn and to rob other birds' nests and even to eat their neighbors' birdlings! But whatever they had done, they were very much frightened and ashamed and huddled together with their heads down. The trial lasted an hour, and then the whole court fell upon the prisoners and killed them!

Thief and cannibal though he sometimes is, the blackbird must have some good about him, for his little mate loves him dearly. Perhaps it is because he is nearly always bright and cheerful. The blackbirds live in flocks and do not

"neighbor" with other birds. They build rough-looking nests, which are more carefully made than one would think. Mrs. Blackbird works quickly, but she is careful that each straw and stick, which she and her husband bring, is put in right and that the mud lining is of just the right thickness. The eggs vary in color and marking, being a soiled shade of blue or bluish-green, curiously marked and streaked with brown.

*THE RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD*

"O-ka-lee! O-ka-lee!" This is the song-note and jubilee call of the cheery redwing. He lives near the marsh or slough, and has a special liking for a willow hedge. No doubt you have often taken note of his black coat and his pretty scarlet shoulders edged with yellow. He is a social chap, and is seldom seen without a company of his kin or other bird neighbors; for this reason he is often spoken of as "the bird of society." He has a number of names, among them being red-winged oriole, swamp black-bird, and red-winged starling.

If you chance to walk down by the willow hedge where he is keeping careful guard of the three or four nests where his frowsy wives are brooding, he will stop you with an excited cry. It sounds like "*chut? chuck?*" But, no doubt, he means "What do you want?" If you do not

satisfy him, he gives out a shrill, full call of alarm. Then his wives come out and join in giving you a good round scolding!

Baby redwings are brought up on insects, and such hosts of them as it takes! The parents are



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

A sociable chap who likes to live in the swamps.

kept busy from early till late, so the redwings are valuable neighbors. They have one fault which their farmer friends find hard to forgive. They like to regale themselves with green corn, and frequently do considerable damage when the corn is in the milk. Then, too, they have a provoking habit of gathering in the tree tops and holding a jubilee after they have done their worst! Small wonder that the farmer is often driven into level-

ing his gun at them! But, if he stops to think it over, he smiles at their merrymaking and gives them the freedom of the fields. No doubt the insects which they have killed would have made far greater ravages in the corn.

#### THE MEADOW-LARK

The meadow-lark is a handsome fellow; you are sure to fall in love with him on sight. He is a large chestnut brown bird, with a pretty buff collarette, and a big black crescent on his buff vest. There is a legend about this crescent, of course. It seems that ages and ages ago the larks used to sing with their breasts leaning against the moon. At last the gods grew alarmed and feared that the birds might topple the moon over, so they bade them fly away and lean no more. The crescent is the shadow cast by the moon on their dainty breasts.

Perhaps you may already have seen the meadow-lark. Do you remember early in March, before there was any signs of spring, the bird that sat up on the telephone wire and called out so cheerily, "*Spring o' the year! Spring o' the year!*" That was the meadow-lark. And how honest and true his cry seemed, though it was hard to believe him when all out doors seemed so dreary! But he kept happily at it: "*Spring*

*o' the year! Spring o' the year!"* until his promise really came true.

At different times of the year, the meadow-lark seems to say different things, though there is



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

MEADOW-LARK

He has a note of gladness in his song.

always the same number of notes in his call. Why, if you will believe me, once when we were picking cherries a meadow-lark came and sat in a neighboring tree top and called out over and

over, as plainly as could be, "*Don't take 'em all! Don't take 'em all!*" Just the other day we read of a meadow-lark calling out to a young man, "All things—all things—come round to him—to him—who will but wait!" Perhaps he may say something quite different to you, if you will take the trouble to call upon him. You will find him at home in the pasture and meadow. Possibly you may chance to catch him on a fence post pouring out his heart to his dainty little mate as she broods in the grass.

But you will have to keep your eyes open if you see Mrs. Meadow-lark, for she is very much the color of the grasses about her. Then, too, the nest is carefully hidden under an arch of timothy. So you may pass very close indeed and not see it, unless the frightened little mother takes alarm. And even then perhaps you may not find the nest, for there is often a winding pathway, cleverly covered over, which leads to the nest, and the bird may escape by this, thus leading you away from the precious spot in the very beginning of your search.

The white-speckled eggs and helpless little birdies are terribly preyed upon by the field mice and snakes, and the old birds have a thrilling time raising two or three broods each season. Unless the winter is very severe, some of the meadow-larks are quite apt to spend the winter with us,



but one has to look twice to know them, as their winter coat is only a dim, grayish-brown copy of their summer glory.

It is impossible to reckon the great amount of good the meadow-larks do in a single season, while searching for their food among the various insects which prey upon the roots of grasses and grain. Seventy-three per cent. of their food is insects, the favorites being crickets, grasshoppers, and beetles. The seed diet is said to be mostly noxious weeds.

#### *THE ORIOLES*

I hope you know the orioles. They are such delightful little friends. The family numbers about fifty members, but only three are well-known in our country—the Baltimore oriole, the orchard oriole, and the Bullock oriole.

No bird is more useful than the oriole. He is death to all sorts of beetles, spiders, caterpillars, worms, plant-lice, and other pests which prey upon the foliage of plants. And he prefers a meat diet almost exclusively, taking only about sixteen per cent. of his daily fare in vegetables, so that he is of great service to farmers and gardeners in destroying harmful insects.

The name oriole is said to mean “golden glory.” No doubt it was given to these birds because of their rich voices. They have a beautiful, merry

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whistle, so delightful that once heard it is never forgotten. The Baltimore oriole, it is claimed, got his special name from Lord Baltimore himself. But perhaps you have never heard of him. He was a great man who came from over the sea



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE

A beautiful bird whose song is a delight, whose nest is a miracle.

to build in our free land a home for his Roman Catholic friends. The party settled in Maryland, and shortly after their arrival were charmed with the cheery whistle of a number of beautiful birds. These birds wore the colors of Lord Baltimore's own family—orange and black. He was delighted with them and knew them for orioles, but he felt quite sure that no one had yet

given them a name, so he proudly gave them his own.

Other people also have named the Baltimore oriole. They call him the golden oriole, the English robin, the golden robin, the hang-nest, and the fire-bird. Which name do you think suits him best?

I wonder that some one has not dubbed him the "Peter bird." Have you not heard him calling over and over, "*Peter, Peter*"? Sometimes he says, "*Clara, Peter*." Just what does he mean? Perhaps his own name is Peter, and he wishes to let his little mate, Clara, know that he is near, keeping careful watch for enemies of every sort.

The Baltimore oriole has a funny call early in the morning. The little boy at our house used to say that he said "Little boy, you better get up! Little boy, you better get up!" And he was so cheery and insistent about it that the boy just had to go out and see what he wanted. Then, ten to one, Mr. Baltimore would whistle, "Little boy, you better watch out! Little boy, you better watch out!"

The Baltimore oriole is pretty well distributed over the United States east of the Rocky Mountains. He is a beautiful fellow, not quite so large as the robin, dressed in a gay suit of orange and black. There are white spots and edgings

on his black wings, and his black tail quills are tipped with yellow. You cannot mistake him, but Mrs. Baltimore is not so easy to identify. She is very like half a dozen other quiet mother birds that have brilliant husbands. Her coat is yellowish-olive, with brown, white-trimmed wings, and a yellowish-brown tail. She is very shy, and slips about quietly under the screening leaves. The best way to make sure of her is to trail her to her nest, and you will have to be pretty clever to do it!

The poet Lowell gives us a pretty picture of the oriole building his home:

Hush! 'tis he!  
 My Oriole, my glance of summer fire  
 Is come at last, and, ever on the watch  
 Twitches the pack-thread I had lightly wound  
 Around the bough to help his house-keeping,—  
 Twitches and scouts by turns, blessing his luck,  
 Yet fearing me, who laid it in his way,  
 Heave ho! Heave ho! he whistles as the twine  
 Slackens its hold. Once more now! and a flash  
 Lightens across the sunlight to the elm  
 Where his mate dangles at her cup of felt.

You can never mistake the Baltimore oriole's nest, for no other bird builds one like it. It is a dainty, swinging pouch or cradle, about seven inches deep, and so firmly fastened that no matter how hard the winds blow it never comes down,

And it is a miracle of weaver's art! How does the little bird manage with nothing but her bill—slender and needle-like though it is? Why, there is not a man or woman in the whole country who could do such a thing with only one tool! And of such odds and ends, too—bits of plant fiber, string, and horse hair, carefully lined with down and wool. The work is done almost entirely by the female, who clings to the structure with her sharp toes, and works always from below, poking the thread up and pulling it down through the width of two or three rounds in order to make it solid. The eggs are bluish-white, all streaked and marked with brown.

West of the Rocky Mountains, the Bullock oriole takes the place of our friend Baltimore. The birds are very much alike, save that the Bullock oriole is much duller in plumage. Fruit-growers along the Pacific slope value these birds highly because of their strong liking for the black olive scale, the leaf and tree hoppers, and the larvæ of the coddling moth.

The orchard oriole is not nearly so well known as the Baltimore oriole, though he has much the same range; perhaps this is because he is more sober in coloring and considerably shyer. His head, throat, back, wings, and tail are jet black, with some tiny whitish-yellow markings on the wings and tail. The rest of his dainty body is

bright chestnut or reddish-brown. And, oh, what a brimming load of song he carries! His notes come so fast that they fairly tumble over one another. The poet Wordsworth says:

“Not an inch of his body is free from delight.  
Can he keep himself still if he would? Oh, not he!  
The music stirs in him like wind through a tree.”

Mrs. Orchard Oriole is very soberly clad, something after the fashion of Lady Baltimore. But if you will look more closely, you will see that she has a black throat and buff shoulder bars, and altogether is more brownish-olive than her cousin. She builds a beautiful nest, but it is not shaped like Mrs. Baltimore's. It is woven carefully in the fork of a tree, and is a wonder of neatness and art. Fine sweet-smelling grasses are her materials, and she does not allow Mr. Oriole to set foot in the nest until it is done. He would be sure to catch his toe, man-fashion, in some delicate thread, and work a sad havoc! So nearly does the color of the nest blend with its surroundings, that many an old apple tree contains a secret all unguessed by those who sit in its shade. The eggs are dusky-white, spotted with dark brown.

We once saw an orchard oriole in company with his cousin Baltimore, perched in the topmost branches of an old box elder, both fairly

splitting their little throats in their efforts to outdo each other, and to waft their love songs to their little mates which were brooding in the garden.

### THE BOBOLINK

The bobolink is well known in song and story. He was a favorite with the poet Lowell, who dubbed him "June's bridesman" and spoke of him as "gladness on wings." The latter title seems just to suit him, as

Half hid in tiptop apple blooms he sings,  
He climbs against the breeze with quiverin' wings,  
Or, givin' way to't in a mock despair,  
Runs down, a brook o' laughter, through the air.

He is a close neighbor of his friend and cousin, the meadow-lark. Indeed, if you time your visit to the pastures just right, you may catch him perched on tip-toe on a stout weed stalk singing with all his might. And what is he saying?

"Bob-o-link, bob-o-link,  
Spink, spank, spink,  
Sure there was never a bird so fine,  
Look what a nice new coat is mine,  
Chee, chee, chee!"

And it is a fine coat! There can be no doubt of it. Black and white, as becomes the fashionable wedding garment, with a gay yellow patch

on the nape of the neck, a few streaks and splashes on the middle of his back, and yellow tips on the wing and tail feathers. Bobolink knows that it will not wear long, and he makes the best of it.

Our gay little friend has more names and titles than one bird should have by good rights. And yet, strange to say, at different times of the year, most of these titles are very appropriate. Here are some of them: meadow-bird, May bird, American ortolan, butter bird, reed bird, and rice bird. So it will be seen at once that the bobolink is a queer fellow, subject to many changes. The name which he gives himself, however, seems to us to be the very best name of all. Listen!

"Bob-o-link, bob-o-link,  
Spink, spank, spink."

It is said that bob-o-link has a reason for publishing his name in and out of season. You see folks used to call him the "skunk blackbird" and he got sick and tired of it. Who wouldn't? The idea of calling such a dashing, handsome fellow a skunk blackbird, just because the skunk is fond of eating him! Why any number of feathered friends might have an equal right to the title!

Often people disagree as to "Robert of Lincoln's" call note. Some say that he says "just think," "don't you wink, don't you wink," "want



a drink, want a drink," etc. The boys in New England hear him dunning, "Bob-o-link, bob-o-link, and Tom Denny, Tom Denny, come pay me the two sixpence you've owed for a year and a half!—'tshe, 'tshe, 'tsh, 'tsh, 'tshe!" What does he say to you?

The bobolinks are among the last birds to come, not arriving until the grass in the meadows is just the right height to screen the nest, and there are plenty of insects running all about to make housekeeping easy. The females do not arrive until several days after the males. They are quiet little creatures in dull yellow-brown, with light and dark dashes on back, wings, and tail and two deeper stripes on top of the head.

Then such a courting as ensues! Wilson Flagg gives us a delightful glimpse of it in his lines:

"A flock of merry singing birds were sporting in the grove;  
Some were warbling cheerily, and some were making love;  
There were Bobolincoln, Wadolincoln, Winterseeble. Con-  
quedle—

A livelier set was never led by taber, pipe, or fiddle,—  
Crying, 'Pshew, shew, Wadolincoln, see, see Bobolincoln,  
'Down among the thistle-tops, hiding in the buttercups!"

. . . . .

"Now they rise and now they fly;  
They cross and turn, and in and out, and down in the mid-  
dle and wheel about,  
With a 'Pshew, shew, Wadolincoln; listen to me, Bobolin-  
coln!"

As soon as bobolink has won the consent of the demure little Quaker-like maid of his choice, he goes fairly off his head with joy, and is of no manner of use in the nest building. He mounts a weed stalk and fairly strains his vocal cords trying to voice all his happiness at once, and no doubt his little birdie is quite satisfied. For it is no trick to set up a bobolink household. Often the deserted nest of a field-mouse makes a splendid nursery. It is only necessary to put in a new lining, and there you are! Mrs. Bob eats as she works, for there are little insects running all about. Often they almost fall into her mouth as she picks a blade of grass.

Five or six bluish-white eggs are laid, and the mother bird broods over them carefully, while Robert stands guard, like the very "braggart and prince of braggarts he is, pouring boasts from his little throat!" Listen!

"Brood, kind creature; you need not fear  
Thieves and robbers while I am here,  
Chee, chee, chee!"

"Never was I afraid of man,  
Catch me, cowardly knaves, if you can!  
Chee, chee, chee!"

You see, he is very sure that no one can find the nest, and his confidence makes him bold. For has not his little wife concealed it so cleverly

that one may walk right by it and never see it, even when he is looking for birds' nests? However, one who is at all used to birds would become suspicious in a moment, just by Bob's own silly actions. He utters such a host of dire threats, and jumps about so frantically that a blind man would suspect his precious secret. After all, Robert of Lincoln, in spite of your boasted wiseness, yours is an empty little head!

When the birdlings chip the shell and begin to stretch their hungry little mouths Robert is forced to get busy. Such hosts of grasshoppers, beetles and spiders as they devour! And they never seem satisfied! Poor Bob forgets his "merry old strains," and has time only to call out now and then:

"Bob-o-link, bob-o-link,  
Spink, spank, spink;  
This new life is likely to be  
Hard for a gay young fellow like me:  
Chee, chee, chee!"

He is quite right. Long before the leaves begin to turn, "June's bridesman" is a humdrum crone, "sober with work and silent with care." Indeed, he becomes so moody and morose that his little mate is quite alarmed. Whatever can be the matter with him? She puzzles over it a great deal, and finally discovers that her seedy

little spouse is worrying over his fall suit! In vain she seeks to encourage him, for you know there will be no tailor bill to pay. But Bob seems only to grow more disheartened and finally he sneaks off into the thickest reeds he can find and stays for several days. He comes out so changed and crestfallen that even his wife and children do not recognize him. Gone are his gay dashing airs and his wedding garments! He is only a poor reed bird now, dressed in plain yellow-brown. He joins the flock of females and young birds that have gathered in the meadow during his absence, and apparently devotes his whole time just to getting fat.

In the latter part of August, the bobolinks begin their journey southward, traveling mostly at night. Formerly, when the low marshy shores of the Carolinas and some of the more southern States were devoted to rice culture, the bobolinks, or rice birds as they are called in these sections, did great damage to the ripening grain, and furnished no end of delicious platters for the table of the revengeful planters. With the change in the rice-raising districts, however, this damage is no longer done, and the bobolinks make their way in safety to South America and the West Indies, and in the course of time, come rioting back to our pastures and meadows again—sporting a new spring suit!

*THE COWBIRD*

The cowbird is often spoken of as the brown-headed oriole. No doubt you have often met him in the pasture, and perhaps you may have mistaken him for the meadow-lark. But aside from their trim gracefulness, the cousins are



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

## COWBIRD

A lazy loafer who doesn't want to be bothered with housekeeping, or rearing children.

really not very much alike. Mr. Cowbird wears a handsome coat of black, and his head, neck and breast are a glistening cinnamon brown. Mrs. Cowbird, like most of the dames in the bird world, is clothed in sober colors, being a sort of faded, washed-out copy of her mate.

These birds have none of the thievish, murderous habits of their blackbird kin, and do con-

siderable service in ridding out troublesome insects. But, notwithstanding all this, they have a very black character indeed, because of the lazy, shilly-shally, irresponsible females, who are too society-loving to stay at home and rear their young in approved bird fashion. They often lay their egg on the ground and eat it to save further trouble! Some of the less scatter-brained ones, however, sneak around the homes of their bird neighbors, and if the little housewife steps out for a moment, they slyly lay one of their own eggs in the nest, often throwing out an egg to make room for it.

It is said that the cowbirds specially seek out the nests of the vireo, the summer yellowbird, and the chipping sparrow. But we see no reason to believe this. It would be altogether too much trouble. No doubt they lay in the first unguarded nest that comes handy. As often as not, it is patient little Mrs. Bobolink who is thus imposed on. Does she discover the deception? Yes, in a way. On arriving home, her bright little eyes at once discover that something is the matter, and she utters a cry of alarm which brings Robert to her side in a hurry.

"Oh, Bob!" she wails, "something is the matter with one of my eggs! Just look at that! I never laid such a large brown speckled thing in my life! Never!"

Robert is very sympathetic, but all the world looks so gay and good to him that he cannot even harbor any suspicion of wrong, so he tenderly laughs away her fears, and the nesting goes on. Even when the egg is hatched, they do not realize the trick that has been played upon them. It is a source of great worry and trouble that one of their children is so ill-mannered and greedy, and they feel scarcely any regret when they come home some day and find the little rascal gone. "Probably some skunk has eaten him!" says Robert. "It is a blessing he did not get one of our good children." But once again Bob is mistaken; the ungrateful, ill-mannered little chap has only run away and joined a flock of his own kind, feeding close to the cattle's noses in a pasture near by.

The cowbird's song is confined to a few sharp, whistling notes. Some one says that his call note sounds like "*Fidgety! Fidgety!*" And no doubt that is what he does say. It would be just like the silly creature to give itself away in that manner! The cowbirds migrate in flocks in March and November. They are said to be the only birds in America which do not build some sort of a nest and rear their own young.

## THE TANAGERS

A flame went flitting through the wood:  
The neighboring birds all understood  
Here was a marvel of their kind;  
And silent was each feathered throat  
To catch the brilliant stranger's note,  
And folded every songster's wing  
To hide its sober coloring.

**A** BIRD-LOVER asks: "Is there a more beautiful sight in all nature than a grove of orange trees laden with fruit, starred with their delicious blossoms, and with flocks of redbirds disporting themselves among the glossy leaves?" Probably not, yet it is a sight enjoyed by comparatively few. To most people the tanager is but a scarlet memory, so seldom is he seen.

The gorgeous coloring of the male tanager during the breeding season has led him to destruction. Too often has he been brought to earth to supply quills and wings for the milliners! Hunted by man, instinct has made him wary. From one of the cheeriest and friendliest of birds, he has become shy, suspicious, and solitary. His ideal home is an oak grove near a good bathing place, though he is fond of ever-



green trees, possibly because he knows how well his glowing plumage shows off against the green background. He is fond of nesting in an orchard, if he has confidence in the owners.

The tanager family is a large one of about 350 species. Only three members, however, venture outside of tropical borders. These are the scarlet tanager, the Western tanager, and the summer tanager. They are the most charming members of their bright plumaged family, being the only ones who are gifted with much musical ability.

#### *THE SCARLET TANAGER*

“Plumed with fire and quick as flame” the tanager arrives about the first of May and flits above us in the green foliage, as discreet as though he knew he would be best appreciated if seen only by glimpses. What a beauty he is! Brilliant scarlet, with black wings and tail and grayish-white underwing coverts. He reminds us a little of our friend, the cardinal grosbeak, but he has no beautiful crest and then the black wings and tail destroy the illusion.

Why is he caroling so loudly? No doubt his mate is brooding somewhere near. Ah, he is coming down to the ground! Don’t frighten him! He is probably looking for a lunch for his little mate. Yes, he has captured a nice, fat

beetle, and is flying quickly up into that tall oak tree. Get your glass! Oh, there is the nest! It is a rather disorderly looking affair of fibers and sticks, and so transparent that one can see through it from below. There are four dull blue eggs with brown or purple spots, just as it happens.

Mrs. Tanager has none of her mate's glorious coloring, though she has a demure soft beauty of her own, being clothed in a combination of olive-green and yellow. Her dress is, no doubt, a wise provision of Nature. If she were dressed as gayly as her mate, there would be even fewer tanagers throughout the country, as she would often be killed while nesting. The tanager evidently knows that his colors are a menace to his home, for he seldom chooses a tree near by, from which to carol his cheering love song to his patient wife, and goes near her only to carry her food in the shape of beetles, bumble-bees, wasps, and berries. The tanager is naturally timid, but the thought of his family makes him brave indeed, and when danger threatens he often loses his life by flaunting his colors fearlessly in the face of the enemy in the hope of drawing him away from the nest of his loved ones.

When the young are first hatched, Nature favors them by clothing them like their mother, in order that they may pass unnoticed amid the



# SCARLET TANAGER

Male, in mature plumage, perching, female on nest

Order—PASSERES

Family—TANAGRIDÆ

Genus—PIRANGA

Species—ERYTHROMELAS

National Association of Audubon Societies



summer foliage. As they grow older, the male birds gradually get spots and dashes of black and red over their coats, as though their mother had mended their thin dress by left-overs from the father's old suit. You know Mr. Tanager changes his glorious costume early in September, and then "It's a wise tanager that knows its own father," so changed is he in his suit of russet-green slightly speckled with red. Did you ever pick up bright red feathers in the blackberry patch, and recognize them as "shreds of memory from the tanager"?

The tanager's call note sounds like "*Wait! Wait!*" It seems as though he is ever cautioning his family to take due precaution in their search for wasps and bumble-bees. No doubt he knows that they will get stung if they don't! He is a very careful father, and does his best to help his wife train up their single brood and get them in trim for the journey south. They leave early in October, wintering in South America. They return about the time cherries are ripening, and range northward over the United States to the Canadian boundaries. In different localities the birds bear different names, such as firebird, pocket-bird, Canada tanager, and black-winged redbird.

*THE SUMMER TANAGER*

The summer tanager is the familiar redbird of the South, and in the estimation of many, the sweetest singer of his family. He is a tropical beauty of rich, glowing red, well worthy of his familiar titles redbird and vermillion tanager. His mate is dressed in rich olive-green and orange-yellow.

These birds frequent the open woods, groves, and orchards. They have a fondness for tree tops, and a habit of calling "*Wet! Wet!*" which the Southern farmers pretend to believe is certain indication of rain. However, a good authority states that he is by no means a reliable weather prophet, and that he uses this call indiscriminately with his other call of "*Chicky-tucky-tuck.*"

The summer tanager's song is much like the scarlet tanager's, only louder and more musical. His notes have been compared to the robin's, but they are more wiry, more hastily uttered, and continued longer. His song is at its best during the nesting season, when he follows the fashion of his cousin, the scarlet tanager, and temporarily exiles himself from his mate, visiting her only to carry food and to whisper a few low-toned notes of encouragement. This tanager is a bird of quiet, leisurely habits, though he is an expert insect catcher while on the wing. His food con-

sists largely of wasps, hornets, and bees, but he partakes of insects in general and loves wild fruit. His fondness for bees has earned him the rather objectionable name of bee-bird, and has alas! often laid him low. We know of one beautiful, but misguided little chap which came to an untimely end last summer because he insisted on hunting in our apiary day after day!

The nest of the summer tanager is not an artistic affair. Indeed so loosely is it constructed that it looks as if any ordinary summer storm might shake it from its foundations, some eight to twenty feet high on the end of a branch. It is only needed for a short time, however, as the young tanagers hatch in twelve days, and ere a month is ended are able to fly quite well and assist in searching for their food. In the first months of their existence, the young birds all look like their mother. Then the males begin to don patches of red, but it is several years before they attain the pure red plumage of the fully developed adult.

The summer tanagers migrate in April and October. Winter is spent in the tropics. They range throughout the Eastern United States south of Pennsylvania, but are most common in the Southern States.

## THE FLYCATCHERS

**T**HE flycatchers are a large family of over three hundred and fifty species, for the most part residing in the tropics, only about thirty-five of them being found in the United States. They are called "songless perching birds," though they are not entirely without music. They are dressed in sober colors; have pointed wings which are usually longer than the tail; very small feet, suitable only for perching; broad, slightly hooked bills; nostrils overhung with long, stiff bristles in which to entangle the small flying insects which form their chief article of diet. They have a habit of perching upon a dead tree, telegraph pole, or fence rail, and watching silently for passing insects. The flycatchers are affectionate mates, but they care little for the company of other birds. We shall tell you of the ones we are most apt to meet in everyday walks. They are the great-crested flycatcher, the king bird, the phoebe, the wood pewee, and the least flycatcher.

### *THE GREAT-CRESTED FLYCATCHER*

The great-crested flycatcher is the largest member of his family which frequents this coun-



try. He has nearly nine inches of feathers and is a sporting ruffian through and through. His crested, large-eyed head and unkempt feathers are enough to strike terror to the hearts of timid little birds. Indeed, he is the nursery bug-a-boo. No doubt overwrought bird mothers often say to their obstreperous fledgelings, "The great-crested flycatcher will get you, if you don't watch out!" John Burroughs calls him the "wild Irishman" of the flycatchers. His harsh, rasping call is enough to set one's teeth on edge. His awful cry even startles his own babies in their nest, and raises the hair on their heads into a crest which lasts through life!

Despite his sporting character, the great-crested flycatcher is the most dignified and handsomely dressed member of the family. Both male and female wear coats of grayish-brown, washed with olive-green; throat and breast are pearl gray, underparts sulphur yellow, wing coverts crossed with two irregular bars of whitish-yellow, a panel of bright rufous adorns the tail and the extremities of the wings. They are bullies toward other birds, often driving out woodpeckers and bluebirds from their homes in the hollow trees and taking possession. They line their nest with a bit of snake skin, which is often left protruding from the hole in the tree, as a sort of terrorizing banner to frighten away

chance meddlers. Perhaps this grewsome blanket is more responsible than Mr. Great-crest's awful yell for raising the feathers on the heads of the four birdlings, which hatch from the purple-streaked cream-colored eggs.

The great-crested flycatcher is found throughout the Mississippi Valley westward to the plains, and in the Eastern United States as far north as Massachusetts. He migrates in September to his winter hunting grounds in Mexico and Central America, and does not return until May.

#### *THE KINGBIRD*

Few of our common birds are better known than the kingbird, or tyrant flycatcher, and alas! but few have a more unenviable reputation. But really, his is a case more of having the name than having the game, for he has some characteristics which should endear him to the farmer and gardener. He is not, strictly speaking, a quarrelsome bird, as he usually lives in peace with the smaller birds unless they intrude on his rights. It is the birds of prey and the crows and the blue jays which arouse his ire. He hates them for the cowardly, sneaking thieves that they are, and delights in appointing himself policeman for his little neighborhood and establishing a station in some tall tree, or other vantage point, from which he keeps a sharp lookout at all times, excepting



Photo by H. K. Job

#### A KINGBIRD FAMILY

Courtesy of Outing Pub. Co.

Known as a fighter, but usually peaceable enough if let alone.

when off duty while taking his turn at the nest in order that his mate may get a little airing while she searches for food. His meals are mostly caught on the wing, flycatcher fashion, while engaged in his arduous, self-appointed task.

We are always glad to have a pair of kingbirds nesting near the poultry yard. How they do hate a hawk! Woe to one of these chance air-prowlers that gets into their precinct! They are over and about him in an instant, alighting on his back and pecking him unmercifully about the head and neck, until he is glad to turn about and flee for his life. The kingbird also renders great service to horses and cattle by killing large numbers of gadflies. No doubt you have often seen one of these birds perched upon old Brindle's back as she lies at rest.

Ninety per cent. of the kingbird's food is a meat diet, consisting of beetles, grasshoppers, butterflies, wasps, spiders, etc. He has been accused of possessing a great fondness for bees, and for this reason is not looked upon with favor by bee-keepers, who have given him the name of bee-martin. Good authorities, however, maintain that the bird eats nothing but the drones.

In size, the kingbird comes next to his cousin, the great-crested flycatcher, being somewhat over eight inches in length. He wears a grayish-slate color coat, his black tail is almost rounded and

broadly tipped with white, his vest is silken white, and he has a concealed crest of orange-red on his crown. His feet and bill are black. Mrs. Kingbird is similar to her mate, with the exception of the crown. They are very devoted to each other, and think there is no place like home.

Birds of the garden and orchard as they are, the nest is necessarily built in a variety of trees and shrubs. Where these are lacking, they have been known to nest on a fence post and even on fence rails. Their favorite site is a nice shady apple branch, fifteen or twenty feet from the ground. The nest is a closely woven mass of weed stalks, grasses and moss, lined with plant down and fine grasses. The eggs are from four to six, white, rosy, or creamy, as the case may be, and daintily spotted with brown and lilac. The young kingbirds are plump, troublesome babies, who cry a great deal. They very closely resemble their parents. The family migrates in May and September.

#### THE PHOEBE

It seems pain-prompted to repeat  
The story of some ancient ill,  
But "*Phoebe! Phoebe!*" sadly sweet  
Is all it says, and then is still.

. . . . .  
"*Phoebe!*" is all it has to say  
In plaintive cadence o'er and o'er,

Like children that have lost their way,  
And know their names, but nothing more.

—Lowell.

The phoebe is a sad-colored little bird, about an inch longer than the English sparrow, familiar around barns and bridges throughout the United States east of the Rocky Mountains. He is often called the water pewee because of his fondness for nesting in the under timber of a wooden bridge, or of fastening his nest to a rock over running water.

He is dressed in a dull olive-brown, with dingy ivory markings on some of the wing and tail feathers, and soiled white vest. His feet and bill are black, and he wears a slight crest. His call note is a plaintive "*Phoebe! Phoebe!*" as though he called mournfully upon some ghost of his happy past.

The nest is made of mud, moss, and grass, and is a beautiful work of bird art. Both birds work industriously at its construction and are as proud as can be of the four beautiful crystal white eggs, with their tiny reddish-brown spots gathered about the larger end. Though daintily built, the nests are frightfully unsanitary, because they soon become infested with lice from the hen feathers used in the lining. Then, too, Mrs. Phoebe is a dirty housekeeper. Often the young are so weakened by the ravages of pests on their

frail bodies that they die. Usually a fresh nest has to be built for the rearing of the second brood. This is generally placed very near the first one and soon becomes as fully "ready to crawl."



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

#### PHOEBE

Perhaps not as mournful in his disposition as his song would indicate.

Phoebes are said to marry for life, and to return year after year to the same locality. What often appears like the home of a colony of these

birds may be only the fresh nests of one pair of phoebes, built from season to season. These birds arrive early in March, the males traveling somewhat in advance of their wives, though why is a mystery as they are the most devoted of couples. Possibly the slight separation is made that the building of the new home in the midst of their happy reunion may only be the more joyful.

The food of the phoebe is much the same as that of the kingbird. It, too, has a reputation for bee eating. Indeed, it is said that the little phoebes can be heard very plainly on a warm summer day coaxing for "Bees, bees, please." Reliable advices, however, state that the phoebes catch only the drones, and that the parent birds learn to a nicety the time when the big, lazy, bumbling fellows will come forth from the hive each day.

#### THE WOOD PEWEE

"Dear bird," I said, "what is thy name?"

And thrice the mournful answer came,

So faint and far, and yet so near,—

*"Pe-wee! pe-wee! peer!"*

For so I found my forest bird,—

The pewee of the loneliest woods,

Sole singer in these solitudes,

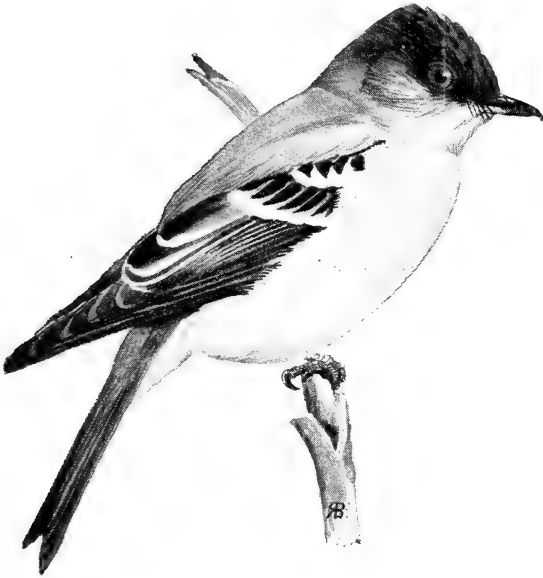
Which never robin's whistle stirred,

Where never bluebird's plume intrudes.

—*Trowbridge.*



The wood pewee is smaller than the phoebe, being about six and a half inches long, or a trifle larger than the English sparrow. His wings are decidedly longer than his tail. His back is dusky



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

WOOD PEWEE

A haunter of the deep woods and silent places.

olive-brown, darkest on the head; he wears a dingy white vest, which grows yellowish toward the center; his wing coverts are tipped with soiled white, forming two indistinct bars; he has whitish eye-rings and black bill and feet.

He is a haunter of tall shady trees in the deep woods, being one of the very few birds that does

not love the sunshine. He cares little for the haunts of man and seldom ventures nearer his dwelling than the orchard. His mournfully sighing call "*Pe-wee, pe-wee, peer*" is one of the familiar notes of the woodland. He may frequently be seen perched on the end of a dead limb giving vent to his sad plaint, which is not, however, so absorbing that he cannot see the tiniest insect that floats near him.

The pewee builds its dainty nest at different heights, but usually prefers a limb fully twenty feet from the ground. The nest is a shallow, rounded cradle so cleverly fastened on to the mossy limb with bark and lichens that it takes a sharp eye to discover it. Inside are four or five creamy-white eggs, wreathed with brown and lilac spots at the larger end.

This woodland lover is a common summer resident throughout the eastern part of North America, arriving about the first of May. While with us he exhibits the same untiring hunting industry characteristic of his family, and seems to care only for his little mate, his children, and his dinner. He leaves for other, though perhaps not happier, hunting grounds in Central America when the leaves begin to fall and merry nutting parties come poaching in his private preserves.

*THE LEAST FLYCATCHER*

Filled with an untiring energy is this little sprite of New England and the Lake Regions.



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

## LEAST FLYCATCHER

This is the natural size of the tiny bird.

“Least” of all the flycatchers is he, being even smaller than the English sparrow. He is clothed

much like the wood pewee and the phoebe, and were it not for his call-note "*chebec, chebec*," might easily be mistaken for one of them. However, there is usually more gray in his sober suit than either of his relatives wears, and if one can get close enough to see his bill, it will serve as a mark of identification, as the lower half of it is horn color instead of black. He is quite sociable and willingly makes his home in orchards and gardens.

In some localities, this busy body is known by his call note, "*Chebec*." He may be seen perched on the top limb of some great tree, a mere speck against the sky, his little tail and wings jerking excitedly up and down. Suddenly he launches forth, and if he were near enough, we would hear the sharp click of his little bill as it closes over his prey. After making a few graceful wheels and circles in the air, he returns to his station, which he often occupies for two hours or more at a stretch.

In Southern latitudes, unfrequented by the least flycatcher, is a small cousin called the Acadian flycatcher, much like his Northern relative except that he frequents the forests. He has a habit of interspersing his trapping flights with a queer note or hiccough which seems to choke him.

## THE WRENS

**I** FEEL quite sure that you know some of the delightful little Wren family—Johnny and Jenny, for instance. This is a family of considerable size, there being over two hundred and fifty members scattered over the world; but only twenty or so in this country. By far the best known is the house wren, that we all call “Jenny.”

### *THE HOUSE WREN*

“We always speak of Jenny Wren,” says Mrs. Wright; “always refer to the Wren as she, as we do of a ship. It is Johnny Wren who sings and disports himself generally, but it is Jenny who, by dint of much fussing and scolding, keeps herself well to the front. She chooses the building site and settles all the little domestic details. If Johnny does not like her choice, he may go away and stay away; she will remain where she has taken up her abode and make a second matrimonial venture.”

I think she would have to look twice anyway, to recognize Johnny. Clothed in beautiful cinnamon brown, finely barred on wings and tail,

they are as near alike as two peas, and so full of joyous, bubbling spirits that they are seldom still for a moment. See how bright their eyes are! And how straight they carry their reddish-brown tails! They have fierce tempers, too:



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

#### HOUSE WREN

In their small house Jenny is indisputably the "boss."

Jenny is always scolding. They are about one-fourth smaller than the English sparrow, and so full of spunk that they can put these famous little fighters to rout without half trying.

Johnny and Jenny love to nest in the porch and behind window shutters. A pair of wrens has

nested in an old tin can on a shelf in our workshop for the past two seasons. Last summer I found a nest in a ball of binder twine. Another pair nested in the pocket of an old coat that had been carelessly thrown over the garden fence.

For so small a bird, the nest is large, indeed. But then it has to be to hold the nestlings. The wrens like a large family, and as many as eight or ten eggs are laid. You may be sure the hungry youngsters make lots of work. Such a vast quantity of insects as it does take! Millions and millions of them! Poor John becomes quite careworn and half forgets the merry strains that often swelled into joyous torrents in the early days of nest building.

Like many other birds, the wrens have a large "land-grabbing" instinct. They often work on two or three nests at a time, placing them quite near each other. Why they do this is a mystery. Perhaps they have to "improve" their claim in order to make it valid in the Bird World. They often use one of the extra nests in which to rear a second brood. So, perhaps, they build it early in the season while they feel fresh and eager to carry on life's battles. Possibly, too, they are afraid building material will be scarce later in the season.

*THE WINTER WREN*

Some people think that the house wrens remain in the North all the year, but this is a mistake. They go South early in October. It is their cousin, the winter wren, which we see in winter time. This wren is a "winter wren" in name only, for he is frequently with us in summer, though he is seldom seen, as he keeps well hidden in the tangled underbrush of the deep woods. Hunger and cold drive him into the haunts of man. One authority says: "With a forced confidence in man, that is almost pathetic in a bird that loves the forest as he does, he picks up whatever lies about the house or barn in the shape of food—crumbs from the kitchen door, a morsel from the dog's plate, a little seed in the barnyard. Happily rewarded is he if he can find a spider lurking in some sheltered place, to give a flavor to the unrelished grain." Like all the wrens, this little chap is exceedingly fond of bathing. He has been known to take his daily dip in zero weather of December, apparently enjoying it very much.

*THE MARSH WREN*

The long-billed marsh wren and his shyer cousin, the short-billed marsh wren, as their names indicate, are to be found in marshy places near



the water. You may know them by their small size, their brown color, their long slender bills and erect tails, and their extreme nervousness. They are delightful singers, and if you manage carefully, you may sometime chance to hear a full chorus; for it is seldom that a single bubbling songster is left to finish his glee without half the colony joining in.

Both of these wrens build hooded nests, weaving them carefully of sedge grass and tiny twigs, with a soft lining of meadow grass and plant down. The entrance is at the side. Quite often the long-billed wrens suspend their nests in low bushes or tussocks of tall grass; the short-billed wrens prefer carefully secluded mounds in clumps of wild rice or sedges. And both of them build several nests. It is said that these extra homes are built for protection—to fool the public, if you please. The male bird always trails the chance visitor to an empty nest; and if this does not satisfy his curiosity, to another one just as forsaken, to prove conclusively that he is not a householder with a growing family! The eggs of the short-billed wrens are pure white; those of the long-billed species are so densely speckled as to look almost brown. The nest is forsaken at once if either of these birds get an inkling that it has been discovered. They prefer to bring up their youngsters in the strictest privacy—accord-

ing to the "little birds must be *heard* and not *seen*" policy.

#### THE CAROLINA WREN

The Carolina wren is the largest and most attractive bird of this family. His name is so entirely unsuitable, that we have privately dubbed him, "Little Sweeter'n Ever." It is exactly what he says when something has especially pleased him—and something nearly always has! This is his call note. His song is rich and bubbling with joy, and so varied that people accuse him of copying from other birds—of being a *mocking* wren. But we think these birds have full title to all their wealth of song. And they sing merrily at all seasons of the year. Certainly, they are the sprightliest bits of feathers imaginable. If it were not for their two safety valves—voice and tail—they would fly all to pieces with pent-up energy.

But the Carolina wren is not nearly so well known as his small house cousin. He hides out a good deal of the time, and loves to live in the hollow of a tree, or a rock crevice. His upper coat is a russet brown; his vest a buff white. He has a rounded back and is about five or six inches long.

## THE SWALLOWS

**H**AVE you ever watched the swallows playing cross-tag over the meadows at eventide? How they circle and dart hither and thither, calling to one another in little laughing musical twitters! They do not seem to know what it means to feel tired, and yet they have been on the wing all day, earning their living. And such a delightful way to earn a livelihood! Do you not imagine you would like it if you were a bird, sailing about in the air all day, now high above the ponds and marshes, again skimming low across the meadows, here, there and everywhere according to your fancy?

Mr. Burroughs speaks of the sparrows as "skaters in the fields of air, on steely wings that sweep and dare." Their long, blade-like wings cut the air with easy, graceful strokes, which propel them enormous distances before they have collected enough mosquitoes, gnats and other little gauzy-winged insects to supply their appetites. Nothing escapes their widely-gaping mouths. A sticky saliva glues the little victims as fast as if they were caught on flypaper, until enough have been trapped to make a pellet, when they are swallowed in one lump. And it takes

many of these lumps to make a meal; so that no more useful friend to man can be found than the swallows. They are especially valuable in the orchard, because of their fondness for curculio, one of the worst insect enemies the fruit-grower has to fight.

Some eighty odd members of the swallow family have been recorded. The largest one is the Australian needle-tail, which is almost exclusively a truant of the air. The most ingenious one is the fairy martin, also a native of Australia. Its nest is an odd bottle-shaped affair of mud and clay. Several birds build at one nest, one staying inside to shape the mortar which the others bring to him. The necks of the "bottles" are from seven to ten inches long, and the bulb or nest is from four to seven inches in diameter. They are rough on the outside, but the inside is beautifully smooth. Sometimes these mud-flasks are found fastened in rows under the eaves; again they are placed upon the steep face of a cliff, hundreds of them crowded close together, without the slightest order, their necks sticking out in all directions.

All swallows are masons. They knead the mud or clay with their beaks, binding it together with saliva. Some species build nests entirely of saliva. These form the edible birds' nests so highly prized by the Chinese as a table dainty.

Only new white nests are used, and it is no easy task to gather them, as they are found sticking to the perpendicular rock, and the pickers must be lowered by ropes from above. But perilous as is the business, the trade in these nests is very large, amounting to nearly a million dollars annually.

The swallow has figured in history since the earliest times. He earned the title "The Bird of Consolation" by spreading his wings under the cross to lighten the burden for the Savior. He has long been a faithful, well-trusted weather prophet, for doesn't it always rain when the swallows fly low? It is said that the old Greeks would not harbor the swallow because he was a "tattler." And there is an old legend that a swallow chirped about the head of Alexander the Great to warn him that his family were plotting against him. When the Emperor Charles was besieging a certain town in Flanders, a swallow made her home upon his tent, and the great general took care that no harm came to her. The story is told in Longfellow's lines, "The Emperor's Bird's Nest":—

"Let no hand the bird molest."

Said he solemnly, "nor hurt her!"

Adding then, by way of jest,

"Golendrina is my guest.

'Tis the wife of some deserter!"

When the army moved onward, the emperor caused the tent to be left standing, that the bird might bring off her brood in safety.

Only ten species of swallows are found in our land. Of these the barn, tree, and bank swallows and the purple martin are best known. The chimney swallow is not a swallow at all, but a swift. He is a cousin of the night-hawk and the whip-poor-will.

#### THE PURPLE MARTIN

Many of you know the purple martin. He is the largest of our swallows, about seven and a half inches in length, with a shining blue-black coat, and a forked tail. He loves to fill the air with little flute-like notes as he flies. Bravest of the brave is he in driving away hawks and other cannibal birds, but he is a coward before that miserable little free-booter, the English sparrow, and often allows the latter to oust him from his home. The name "martin" comes from a Latin word meaning "war-like" or "martial." You remember that Mars was the old God of War, and no doubt you have heard soldiers complimented for their fine *martial* appearance. The purple martin loves to nest in a bird box, but if this is not provided, he is quite satisfied with a hollow tree. The Indians used to strip the trees near their lodges of leaves and hang hollow

gourds on the twigs that the martins might nest in them.

### *THE BARN SWALLOW*

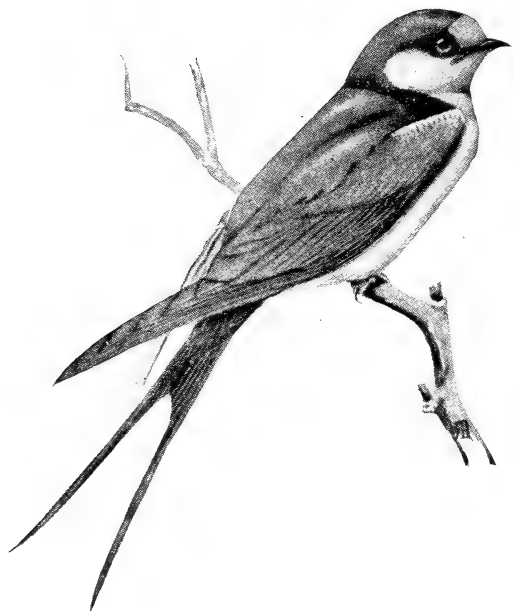
“Barney,” the barn swallow, is a delightful little chap, so sociable and musical, and so useful in destroying the flies and gnats that worry the horses and cattle, that he should be welcomed in every farm yard. He may be recognized by his sharply-forked tail, brick-red throat and buff breast. The nest of a barn swallow is an odd sort of bracket, made of little mud balls and straw and stuck on a rafter, or perhaps on the beam of a bridge. The eggs number from four to six, white, curiously spotted with all shades of brown and lilac. Several broods are raised in a season.

Sociable and friendly as he is by nature, the barn swallow is not met with nearly so often as he was in your grandmother’s time. The reason why is given by Mrs. Mabel Wright in a paper written for the Audubon Societies. She says:

“We associate the swallow with comfortable old-fashioned barns, which had open rafters, doors that could not be shut tight, and windows with many panes lacking. Within such buildings, almost as easy to get into and out of as were the caves and broken crags to which they resorted before barns were built, the barn swallows used to nest, sometimes in large colonies, while their

cousins, the cliff swallows, had quarters beneath the outside eaves in a line of gourd-shaped tenements.

“Nowadays, however, in the more thickly settled and prosperous parts of the country, these



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

BARN SWALLOW

A bird with a host of good qualities.

loosely-built old barns have given place to tightly constructed, neatly painted ones; thus, as the new replaces the old in their haunts, many a pair of swallows drop from their sky-high wooing to find closed doors and tight roofs staring them in the face. So they move on. Whither? Out to the



frontiers or into the 'back countries.' This accounts, in part, for what seems to be, rather than is, a decrease; but there is a constant and real loss of barn swallows, according to reports from all parts of the country, chargeable to the English sparrows. These little bandits seem to have a special fondness for despoiling the nests of swallows of all kinds, tearing them to pieces—perhaps for the sake of the feathers and other good materials for sparrow-use—and disturbing their owners until the harassed swallows finally abandon the premises. This is an extensive evil; and it can be prevented only by our taking the trouble to protect our swallows against their feathered enemies. Cats also catch many swallows, snatching them out of the air as they skim close to the ground in pursuit of grassmoths and similar low-flying insects. Rats and mice devour their eggs and young to some extent.

"A third and sadder reason why fewer barn swallows are now to be seen in a day's drive through the country than used to delight the eyes of bird-lovers, is that for several years they were killed by the thousands to make ornaments for women's hats. This is the bird, in fact, which aroused in the mind of George Bird Grinnell, then editor of *Forest and Stream*, such indignation at the waste of bird-life for millinery, that he wrote that vigorous editorial in 1886 which

immediately led to the founding of the first Audubon Society."

#### *OTHER SWALLOWS*

The tree swallow is often found nesting in great colonies in the hollows of old sycamores and willows. Frequently it can be persuaded to nest in bird houses, and a woodpecker hole in a telephone pole is often a favorite site. Tree swallows always gather along the water before migrating, probably because insects are more plentiful there. Time was when people thought these graceful birds hid in the mud bottom of ponds and rivers, to hibernate for the winter!

The bank swallow, or sand martin, is a giggling little twitterer—the smallest and the plainest of the swallows. His back is just the color of the damp, mottled-gray sands among which he lives. His home is a neat tunnel, wider than it is high at the mouth, and extending back into the bank from a foot to eighteen inches in depth. The bank swallows do great service every year in destroying mosquitoes. So do all the members of the swallow family. Indeed, Mrs. Wright says: "If any one asks you why people should love and protect swallows, even if you have forgotten the names of many of the insects they destroy, remember to answer—'Swallows eat mosquitoes!'"

## THE MOCKING-BIRD FAMILY

**T**HE members of the Mocking-Bird family (or "Mimic Thrushes")—the mocking-bird, the thrasher, and the catbird—are so unlike that we can scarcely believe that they are kinfolks at all. They help to form the connecting links between the thrushes and wrens. Many of the links which help to unite these two species are just as interesting as the mockers, but they are "missing links," being found only in the far South.

The bird nearest to the thrush family proper is the brown thrasher, or brown thrush, as we early learned to call him. Indeed, it is with no little surprise that we first learn that he is not a thrush. He has so long been associated in our minds with Lucy Larcom's lovely, but misleading lines:—

"There's a merry brown thrush sitting up in a tree, 1  
He's singing to you; he's singing to me."

The mocking-bird is the wit of his tribe and the prince of ventriloquists. The catbird is the famous "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" bird. But let us begin at the beginning.

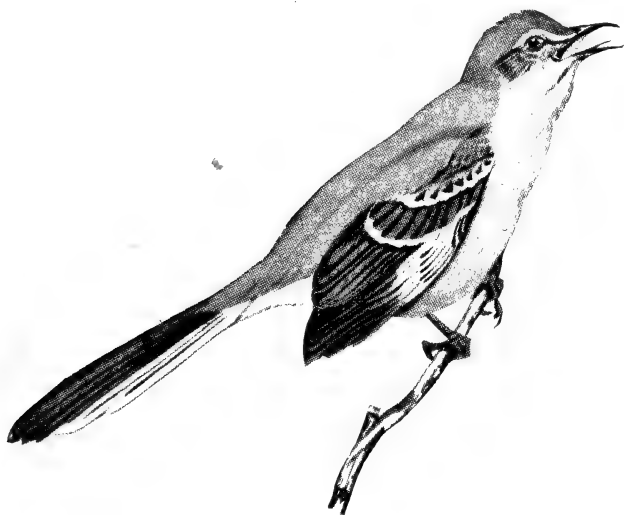
*THE MOCKING-BIRD*

Wit, sophist, songster, Yorick of thy tribe,  
Thou sportive satirist of nature's school;  
To thee the palm of scoffing we ascribe,  
Arch-mocker, and Mad Abbot of Misrule,  
For such thou art by day; but all night long  
Thou pour'st soft, sweet, pensive, solemn strain,  
As if thou didst in this thy moonlight song  
Like to the melancholy Jaques complain,  
Musing on falsehood, folly, vice, and wrong,  
And sighing for thy motley coat again.

—Wilde.

The mocking-bird is a humorist and a mimic. He can do to life any sound which his bird neighbors produce, and not only does he delight in mocking them and producing many a joke and a fright, but he takes great pleasure in imitating the young turkeys, the geese, and even the cat and the pigs. When we first came South, we nearly "died a-laughing" over the joke one of these feathered imps delighted to play on our dog. You see Nig had never heard of a mocking-bird, and she had been trained to come in a hurry when she was called! How silly she looked when she discovered that it was a bird that was making her chase around! You may be sure he never fooled her again, but probably he was just as delighted as we were at her efforts to show that she didn't hear him. And he didn't

forget it either the whole season through! Every now and then he would put in a few minutes whistling for Nig, and how insistent he would get! It was just too funny for anything!



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

#### MOCKING-BIRD

The most versatile and clever of all our native songsters.

The mocking-bird is a good listener. Indeed, it is in this way that he gets his copy. He will sit quietly screened among the leaves all of a long afternoon listening carefully to the various sounds that fill the air; then "when Night lowers her curtains" he will tell all he has heard, throwing in every now and then a few notes of entirely his own composition by way of adding spice and

variety. And a beautiful variety it is! Bright moonlight seems to give him additional inspiration, and such beautiful night choruses as he furnishes in June-time, before he becomes too worn with family cares. Longfellow tells us in "Evangeline" of a mocker, wildest of singers, that:

Shook from his little throat such floods of delirious music  
That the whole air and the woods and the waves seemed  
silent to listen.

Plaintive at first were the tones, and sad; then soaring to  
madness,

Till, having gathered them all, he flung them abroad in  
derision,

As when, after a storm, a gust of wind through the tree  
tops

Shakes down a rattling of rain in a crystal shower on the  
branches.

The mockers are from nine to ten inches in length, or about the size of the robin. Male and female are so nearly alike that few can distinguish them except at nesting time. They wear a modest gray coat which shades to whitish underneath. Wings and wedge-shaped tail are brownish; upper wing feathers are tipped with white, and the outer tail quills are white, showing conspicuously in flight. They share alike in the duties of nest building, and are not at all par-

ticular as to the material used. The nest is large and bulky and placed in low bushes or in trees, as the builders fancy, anywhere from four to twenty feet above ground. They seem to lay the foundation of the nest very carefully, then sticks and grasses are piled rather helter-skelter, and the nest is lined with horse hair and bits of grass. The eggs are speckled green and from four to six in number.

It would seem that the mocker's talent for mimicry would often get him into trouble, but he does not seem to enjoy fighting, and seldom bothers his neighbors farther than making fun of them. No doubt they accept him as a sort of clown and overlook his tricks. The mocker is a favorite "cage bird." If he is caught and tamed while quite young, he is said to make a charming pet, though he is apt to become silly if kept too rigidly behind his prison bars. He loves the freedom of the room, at times, to stretch his wings. Mocking-birds have no fixed time to migrate, and are usually resident in the communities where they nest.

The mockers are fond of fruit, but they like insects, too, and there is little doubt but that they catch enough pests to pay their fruit bill many times over. They harpoon an insect on the wing as cunningly as a flycatcher, and with their "ear"

to the ground, like the robin, they can detect the delicate tread of a bug stealing along under a log or in the grass.

*THE CATBIRD*

He sits on a branch of yon blossoming bush,  
This madcap cousin of robin and thrush,  
And sings without ceasing the whole morning long;  
Now wild, now tender, the wayward song  
That flows from his soft, gray, fluttering throat;  
But often he stops in his sweetest note,  
And, shaking a flower from the blossoming bough,  
Drawls out, "Mi-eu, mi-ow!"

—*Edith M. Thomas.*

The catbird is a strange fellow—jester, mocker, and impersonator. From a beautiful, aristocratic gentleman with finely poised black head and shining gray satin coat, he becomes, without any warning whatever, a sneaking, low-down fellow, with a harsh-rasping voice, and an utter lack of self-respect. He droops around with a hang-dog air that is truly comical when one knows it is only done for a joke. There is no knowing what the catbird may do, so full is he of jokes and tricks that a volume could not contain them all.

Like many another bird, the catbird is wrongly named. Why should a bird with such a lovely song be made to answer to a name coined from his harsh, uncouth call? Or is it possible that he owes his name in part to an old legend? You

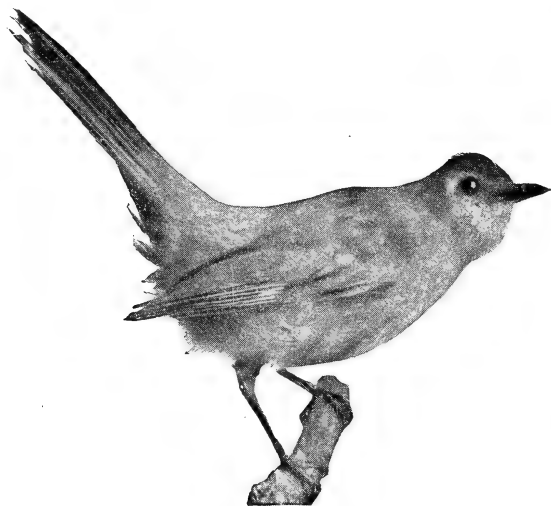


know, it is said that the catbird was once a sneaking gray cat that spent all its time prowling around among the birds' nests and eating their young. All the birds gathered together in a great convention and petitioned the gods to rid them of their enemy. In the twinkling of an eye, the cat was changed into a bird and doomed to nest low in the trees that it might watch the nests of its neighbors. He was made a detective, so to speak, and given the harsh cry of the cat to sound as a watchman's rattle. Of course, the clown abuses his privileges, but does he not for the most part attend well to his duties? Is there ever a commotion, or outcry, among the birds that the catbird does not immediately appear on the scene and add to the clatter by continually springing his rattle? Indeed, he is often the first on the scene. Perhaps some of his ridiculous attitudes and poses are only a part of his detective's disguise. Who knows what bird mysteries he may be engaged in ferreting out while he acts the part of the clown? Some one says that the catbird drops from his graceful, aristocratic poises because he is lazy, and that if he were a man he would go on the streets in his shirt sleeves and without a collar!

There is no more beautiful song in bird language than the catbird's. Mrs. Wright describes it as a varied recital of other birds' notes with

156 LITTLE FRIENDS IN FEATHERS

variations of his own composition which sound like "*Prut! Prut! Coquillicot! Really, really, coquillicot! Hey, coquillicot! Hey! Victory!*" The song is full of unexpected turns and buoyant melody, and may run on almost uninterruptedly



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

CATBIRD

You cannot forget Mr. Catbird. He is both clown and expert songster in one.

for an hour, or close after the first three or four strains. It is probably at its best in the early morning before many of the song birds have lifted their drowsy heads. The harsh cry of the cat is most often heard during the nesting season. Indeed, the multitudinous cares of raising a family seem to affect seriously the tempers of both birds,

and it needs very little to put them in fine scolding order.

Mr. and Mrs. Catbird are dressed alike in dark slate-colored coats, shading to gray underneath. Their wings are much shorter than their tail and give them a rather comical appearance. The tail and the top of the head are black, as are also the feet and bill. There is a patch of chestnut under the tail.

The nest of the catbird is built low, a favorite site being the middle of a blackberry patch, where the tangled bushes make it almost impossible for anything but a bird to enter. It is a loosely constructed affair of sticks and leaves interwoven with bits of string, rags, newspaper, and anything handy. Blanchan calls it a "veritable scrap basket." But it is softly lined, and the little birdies which hatch from the pretty green eggs are cradled in it as snugly as though it were made of finest silk.

The catbird family migrates in May and November. They range from Mexico to the British provinces and westward to the Rockies. There is a species of catbird found west of the mountains which resembles our bird in everything but noise. It is a particularly silent bird and loves the quiet of the thickest shrubbery. The catbird frequents orchards, gardens, pastures, and woods, and does a great deal of good by ferreting out

insects and worms in the tangled berry patches and vineyards. True, it likes fruit and eats a good deal of it in season, but it makes up for it by the large number of insects which it devours the remainder of the year. Winter quarters are in the Southern States and farther South.

#### THE BROWN THRASHER

Sweet and full of inspiration is the song of the brown thrasher, or brown thrush, as he is most often called. In the early spring he is fairly mad with joy. His farmer friends declare that he takes an especial interest in corn planting and they credit him with saying: *"Drop it, drop it, cover it up, cover it up! Pull it up, pull it up!"* It was at this season that Henry Van Dyke heard him calling: *"Luck! Luck! What luck! Good enough for me! . . . Hold your cup! Joy will fill it! Don't spill it! Steady, be ready! Good luck!"*

Very proud is he of his musical accomplishments, and he sits high upon some conspicuous perch that all his bird friends may see him and be filled with envy. Unlike the mocking bird or catbird, he has no talent for imitating other song birds. His music is all his own. In size and markings he greatly favors the thrushes, and like them, too, he seldom sings near his nest. He has one great wren-like characteristic, that of

thrashing his long tail almost continually; even while feeding upon the ground he keeps it wagging in the most ridiculous fashion. It is to this laughable trait that he owes his name of brown thrasher.

He is a beautiful fellow, fully an inch longer than the robin. His brown coat glints in the sun until it seems to be a rich, reddish-brown, growing darker on the wings, which are ornamented with two white bands. His underparts are white, heavily streaked with dark brown, arrow-shaped spots. He has a very long tail, yellow eyes, and a long bill which curves slightly at the tip. The female is a paler color than her lord and master. The thrasher's nest is built upon the ground, or in low bushes. They are common summer residents, migrating in April and October.

A friend once had a brown thrasher for a pet. He was a very restless fellow, never quiet for a moment. One of his greatest pleasures was tearing paper. He would amuse himself for about two hours in tearing up a magazine to the finest bits and throwing them around. It was fun to watch him with a large newspaper. He would stand and shake it, then he would pretend to be scared at the rustle and jump away. Pretty soon he would come sidling back and shake the paper again. After he grew tired of

this play, he would set gravely to work to tear up the paper. He always tore out the pictures first, and took great delight in poking his head through the hole where the picture had been. He was fond of putting himself through a system of feather exercises, and of stretching himself. He seemed to try to see how many different positions and shapes he could get into. His feathers were his great pride, and he spent considerable time in preening and shaking them.

## THE CEDAR WAXWING

**T**HE cedar waxwing, or cedar bird, is a very dainty specimen of beautiful plumage and delightful manners. So polished and polite is he that he has earned the name "Polite Bird." A whole flock will often perch in the tree tops, smooth each other's plumage, bow, scrape, and twitter, and pass choice morsels of food back and forth among their number again and again before one can be found whose greed overcomes his politeness sufficiently to admit of his taking the first bite. The birds are very sociable to one another, except in nesting time, and travel over the country in great flocks, stopping only a short time at a place, as they soon exhaust their food supply.

Visiting such a large territory, as they do, the waxwings have acquired a number of names, among them being cherry bird, Canada robin, and récollet. The latter name is given the birds by the French Canadians, because the color of their crest resembles the hood worn by a religious band who style themselves the *Récollets*. Seeds, buds, berries, and insects are their food. Abbott says: "The raids made by a company of

these birds when they descend upon orchard and shade trees which are infested by the canker-worm, or elm leaf beetle, has proven a blessing to many a horticulturist whose trees were threatened with destruction." The birds are great lovers of cherries, and make many enemies among the fruit-growers who think they eat rather more than they pay for by catching insects.

The cedar waxwing is about one-fifth smaller than the robin, and has a beautiful plumage of soft delicate tones and beautiful sheens. He may be known by his rich, grayish-brown coat, deeply tinted with plum-color on throat, crest, wings, tail, and breast. His chin is black, and a velvety black line runs from his forehead through the eye to the back of the crest. His underparts shade into pale yellow, and there is a broad, bright yellow band across the end of his tail quills. There are bright red tips, like little dabs of sealing-wax, on some of his wing feathers. The female wears paler colors than her mate, has a smaller crest, and a narrower tail band. The waxwing never seems to have a moulting season and is always perfectly groomed. He is a very plump bird, indolent to a degree bordering on laziness, and will sit for hours at a time stuffing himself and moving only when necessary to shift nearer his food.

A soft, lisping twitter in the tree tops suggests



the cedar bird. He has no loud musical notes to announce his presence, and cannot even coax out a few love notes in nesting time, as can some songless birds. He selects his mate late in July or the first of August (the time is earlier in the Southern States), and retires to the quiet of the orchard or the wild crab trees in the pasture near. The nest is a flat, bulky affair, constructed of anything that may be handy, and not unlike dozens of other birds' nests. There are usually four cloudy, purplish-looking eggs, spotted with black. The fledgelings are dainty, well-mannered little fellows, even more demure in color than their modest, velvety-gowned mother.

## THE WARBLERS

**T**HE warblers are delightful bits of feather, smaller for the most part than the English sparrow, and wearing coats of olive, dark blue or black, with gay markings usually of white or shades of yellow. Many of this large interesting family are merely birds of passage, during May and September, nesting far to the North and wintering in the sunny South. They do not always follow the same course in their travels, and even the most zealous bird lover can hope only for a bowing acquaintance with a few members at best. All are insect eaters, so naturally their bills are slender and finely pointed. Some of the family are excellent fly-catchers and take their food on the wing; others, the worm-eating species, creep, like the nut-hatches, around the tree trunks and haunt the tallest tree-tops in nesting time; still others feed and nest along the ground. All are fond of the deep shade, and it takes a sharp eye and a quick ear to note the shy members of the family.

Among the best known warblers in this country are the impish little yellow-breasted chat, the redstart, and the ovenbird.

*THE YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT*

Aloft in sunny air he springs;  
To his timid mate he calls;  
With dangling legs and fluttering wings,  
On the tangled smilax falls;  
He mutters, he shrieks—  
A hopeless cry;  
You think that he seeks  
In peace to die;  
But pity him not; 'tis the ghostly chat,  
An imp, if there is one, rest sure of that.

—Abbott.

The yellow-breasted chat, or yellow mocking-bird, is no relation whatever to the mocking-bird family. He belongs to the wood warblers. He is a clown among birds, and a fine ventriloquist to boot. He can do all sorts of vaudeville stunts and keep his watchers heartily amused for an hour at a time. Burroughs says: "Now he barks like a puppy, then quacks like a duck, then rattles like a kingfisher, then squalls like a fox, then caws like a crow, then mews like a cat." Why he does all this is another bird mystery. Perhaps he goes through his laughable stunts for the entertainment of his brooding mate.

He delights in aerial performances. In one of his principal features, he launches into the air

with a loud cry, then holding his wings stiffly above his back and letting his legs dangle helplessly, he allows his body to descend by a swinging, jerking motion into the shrubbery from which he ascended. Some one has suggested that he executes this bit of bravery with the intention of frightening away his enemies. If he does, it is certainly mistaken energy! Keyser says: "It is odd that these birds, shy and nervous as they are, should go so far out of their way to tell you that they have a nest somewhere in the copse that you mustn't touch, mustn't even look for. While you are yet a quarter of a mile away, they will utter their loud cries of warning; and if you go to the thicket where they are, you will be almost sure to find their nest, so poorly have they learned the lesson of discretion."

The chat is fond of twittering away in his unusual fashion on moonlight nights. He is a bird of rough, berry-grown hillsides, and dense, shrubby fields. He does not seem to care for thick forests of large trees. You may know him by his olive-green back, bright yellow breast, white underparts, black feet and bill, and the white line which nearly incloses his eye in a ring. He is about seven inches long. The nest is a softly lined, bulky affair of grasses, weed stems, and bark, built near the ground in the most tangled part of the shrubbery, where it

might safely be undiscovered, were it not for the crazy capers of the over-anxious male.

The chat is the most common in the Middle



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

#### YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT

A clown among birds who delights in doing stunts.

States, though it nests westward to the plains and from Ontario to Central America. He comes North in May and returns the early part of September.

#### THE REDSTART

I shall never forget my first meeting with this interesting member of the warbler tribe. I had started to go to the barn, one late afternoon in May, on some errand which left my mind the instant I spied a flock of "wind-blown firebrands, half-glowing, half-charred," flitting about on a pile of old decaying apple-logs. Glossy black, flecked with salmon-orange and orange-red on

the sides and wing linings, and a broad band of the same gay hue across the end of the tail, they were a sight to arrest even the most indifferent bird lover. Warbler their size and bill proclaimed; so, too, did the sudden dashes upward of various individuals, to tumble downward in wind-blown somersaults. But I had no notion of their name *Redstart*.—What a misnomer it is! So few of the family really show red. “Orangestart” is nearer the truth.

For an hour or more they lingered, and I and the two kiddies, who were as eager as their mother not to lose a motion of the “new birdies,” watched and listened while they gossiped sociably, albeit a trifle monotonously and hurriedly, oft murmuring over and over, *'tsee, 'tsee, 'tseet*, while they turned restlessly here and there prying under the loose, torn bark, or scrambled nervously creeper-style up and around the trunk of a stunted old boxelder near at hand. Occasionally some happy lover would pause and, fixing his eye on the demure olive-brown and yellow maid of his choice, warble out his hope and longings, or failing notes to express himself, he would simply stand straight, in a sort of graceful, hand-on-heart fashion, and spread his handsome tail feathers in comic resemblance to the grandest peacock that every flaunted his glorious fan.

How swiftly and delightfully the moments

sped by! Later, when our callers had taken wing, and we had identified them beyond a doubt, we found ourselves wishing that we might see them in their summer home—the valley of the Potomac onward to southern Labrador. But even there, so our bird guide assured, we would have to look sharp to find their nests, built of bark, and lined with moss and horsehair, close-fitting in the fork of a tall bush or tree, some ten or fifteen feet from the ground.

#### THE BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER

Canada, it seems, is the warblers' paradise, and of all the large family which flits there to nest none is more charming than the Blackburnian warbler.

"The orange-throated warbler would seem to be his right name," Burroughs tells us; "but no, he is doomed to wear the name of some discoverer, perhaps the first who robbed his nest or rifled him of his mate—Blackburn; hence, Blackburnian warbler. The *burn* seems appropriate enough, for in the dark evergreens his throat and breast show like flame. He has a very fine warble, suggesting that of the redstart, but not especially musical."

Shorter by an inch and a half than the English sparrow, he is so richly clothed in black and yellow, you may at first glance mistake him for a

small oriole. But watch him for a moment, darting in and above the tree-tops like a thing of flame, and you can not help but name him a warbler. His motions define him; so, too, does his warbling high tenor voice. No foliage is dense enough to hide him, and no other warbler is quite so gorgeously arrayed. At least, so thinks his olive brownish-yellow little mate, as she flits after him so lost in admiration as to altogether forget her own voice.

#### THE OVENBIRD

Have you ever by chance heard a bird voice plaintively calling afar in the depths of the woodland, "*Teacher, teacher, teacher, teacher*"? It is the anxious cry of the ovenbird or golden-crowned wagtail. But what it wants with teacher, what woodland problem it so earnestly desires help in solving is a mystery.

"Early in May," says Blanchan, "you may have the good fortune to see this little bird of the woods strutting in and out of the garden shrubbery with a certain mock dignity, like a child wearing its father's boots. Few birds can walk without appearing more or less ridiculous, and however gracefully and prettily it steps, this amusing wagtail is no exception. When seen at all—which is not often, for it is shy—it is usually on the ground, not far from the shrubbery or a



woodland thicket, under which it will quickly dodge out of sight at the merest suspicion of a footstep."

Both male and female wear olive coats, with orange-brown caps, bordered by black lines that



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

#### OVENBIRD

The home of this bird is a veritable little Dutch oven.

curve toward the bill. Their underparts are white, and their breast and sides are streaked and spotted after the manner of the thrush family. It is this feature, combined with various thrush-like traits, which give to the bird its oft-called title of golden-crowned thrush.

The name ovenbird seems odd indeed. But there's a reason, and a very good one you admit

at first sight of this ingenious little feathered friend's nest. It is a veritable little Dutch oven, built neatly into a hollowed out place in the forest floor, where the dead leaves lie the thickest. At first glance it looks like a little hummock made by the uprising of the roots and twigs of some swift-growing plant, and one unused to the ways of ovenbirds would pass it by without a second thought. That is he would but for the silly antics of the birds themselves. At the mere approach of a stranger, be it two-legged or four, the little householders are panic stricken lest their precious secret be uncovered. The mother slips out from the side entrance of her clever nest, and goes limping on ahead of the interloper, uttering strange bewildering cries, and seeking frantically to lead him away from the loved site, ere she takes wing and slips away secure that search as he may her brood is safe. The father bird, too, does every distracting thing that enters his silly noodle, and all the time his nervous tail thrashes and wags until it is a mercy that it doesn't quite wag off!

By the way, it occurs to me that the ovenbird must have been among the last birds to leave when the magpie gave her famous illustrated lesson on nest building. You do not know about it? Well, it was this way: The magpie, it is said, was the first bird to build a nest. All the

other birds besought her to tell how it was done, and she obligingly offered to show them. She first brought some mud, and molded it into a little cake. All the birds sat very still until it was finished. Then the thrush cried out: "O, yes; I see just how you do. Take a cake of mud and hollow it out in the middle! I can do that." And away she flew, knowing nothing at all about nest building, as her nest proves even unto this day. The blackbird tarried a few moments longer, until the magpie had added a layer of twigs, and she flew away satisfied that she knew it all. So it went on, each bird leaving as the lesson progressed, until at last only an absent-minded dove, bereft of her mate, was left mourning in a tree, and paying no attention at all to the magpie's demonstration. The little teacher was very angry, and vowed she would never again try to teach the birds. This is why that to this day there are so many shabby nest builders.

The ovenbird's eggs number from four to six, and are creamy-white, spotted with brown and lilac, like diminutive turkey-eggs. The nest with its precious contents is never out of sight of the little parents. But then they really have no cause to leave it, for their food is right around under foot, as one might say, being made up wholly of the insects and larvæ found beneath the leaves.

According to Burroughs, the ovenbird's love song is "a perfect ecstasy—clear, ringing copious, rivaling the goldfinch's in vivacity and the linnet's in melody." It is delivered in true warbler fashion, as the bird launches from some vantage point and hovers slowly downward. But it is not a familiar song by any means, as the courtship and nestbuilding are carried on in the depths of the solitary woodlands.

#### THE MARYLAND YELLOWTHROAT

This is the title of perhaps the busiest member of the industrious warbler tribe; but why *Maryland* is a query unanswered. It is a bird common enough along the eastern woodland waterside in summer, from Florida to Nova Scotia; winter quarters are in the tropics.

"Unambitious to be seen," says Nuttall, "the yellowthroat seldom ascends above the tops of the underwood, where he dwells, busily employed in collecting the insects on which he feeds. After these, like the wren, he darts into the deepest thicket, and threads his devious way through every opening; he searches around the stems, examines beneath the leaves, and raising himself on his peculiarly pale and slender legs, peeps into each crevice in order to seize by surprise his tiny lurking prey."

If one accidentally wanders into his quarters,

he peers out through his black mask totally unafraid until he thinks the distance between himself and his questioner quite short enough. Then he is off. "But," says Blanchan, "he never goes so far that one is not tempted to follow him,



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

MARYLAND YELLOW THROAT

A bird of retiring disposition who likes the deep thicket.

though it be through dense undergrowth and swampy thickets, and he always gives one just glimpse enough of his beauties and graces before he flies ahead, to invite the hope of a closer inspection next time."

All this, of course, holds so long as one does not come near his nest. For then he is up in arms,

and for the safety of that precious treasure, carefully hidden in a tangled thicket of briers and sheltered by weeds and grasses, he will go to any lengths of scolding and entreaty.

Sometimes the black-masked ground warbler, as the yellowthroat is often called, and his small olive-clad, maskless mate take up their abode in old neglected gardens or briery tangles in the fields not far from the home of man. If they are unmolested, they return to the same spot year after year.

Various hearers have attempted to translate the forceful, energetic love-call of the yellowthroat. One words it "*Follow me, follow me, follow me.*" Another thinks it is "*wichity, wichity, wichity wee.*" Still another says that it is "*I beseech you, I beseech you, I beseech you.*" If ever by good luck you chance to be in his vicinity, be sure to set down what his notes sound like to you.

## THE VIREOS, OR GREENLETS

**T**HE vireos are often called greenlets. The Latin verb "vireo" means "I am green"; so if you remember that you will have a good color key for the family. The vireos are a large family of about fifty species, ranging in size from five to seven inches, for the most part a trifle smaller than the English sparrow. All are American birds, though many of them are found only in the tropical regions of Central and South America. They are olive-green birds, intersected with soft grays and yellows. Their bill proclaims their trade. It is slightly hooked at the tip and serves admirably to hold the bugs and worms which they glean. Very careful and painstaking are they, exploring every crevice in the bark and examining the under sides of the leaves.

All of this family are musical and some of them are gifted singers. They build beautiful homes of bark which they line with pine needles. Great care is taken to fix the nest firmly in the crotch of two or three converging twigs and to cover it by twining the foliage gracefully above it. Only a few members of the family build near

the homes of man, the greater number preferring the quiet of the woodland. But wherever they are, they are happy little citizens and fill the daylight hours with their songs and call notes. They are Nature's optimists.

*THE RED-EYED VIREO*

Sweet little prattler, whom the morning sun  
Found singing, and the livelong summer day  
Keeps warbling still; here have I dreamed away  
Two bright and happy hours, that passed like one,  
Lulled by thy silvery converse, just begun and never  
ended.

—*Lampman.*

The red-eyed vireo is by far the most numerous and familiar of the Greenlet Family, and ranges from the Eastern border of the United States westward to the Rocky Mountains, and from the Gulf States northward through Canada, migrating in April and October. His habit of addressing an imaginary audience has led to his being called "The Preacher." Wilson Flagg interprets the closing of his little sermon as: "*You see it—you know it—do you hear me? Do you believe it?*"

Sir and Madam Red-eye are dressed in the ordinary olive-green coats and whitish vests of their family. However, they are more striking than some of their sober gowned relatives, because of



the slaty cap they wear and the black-and-white lines over their ruby eyes.

They love to make their home in the maple trees, and are often spoken of as "the birds that sing all day in the trees about our lawn." Abbott says: "Catch a glimpse of the red-eyed songster and you will be surprised to learn that the clear volume of song which has entertained you throughout the day, even during the torrid heat of July and August, issues from the throat of so small a bird. Seek an introduction to this vireo and you will find him equally curious to see you. But as to forming an acquaintance, that is another question, and he continues to sing in a manner which would indicate, from the rising inflection of his voice, that a closer acquaintance is not desired."

You may look all summer for the nest of the vireo, and not be rewarded in your search until the screening leaves have blown away at the call of Jack Frost. Then it stands revealed, anywhere from six to twenty-five feet above the ground, a dainty, beautifully-woven, cup-like structure of bark and plant fibers, decorated handsomely with wool, spider webs, twine, and paper, and softly lined with horse hair and wool. The three or four pure white eggs, speckled slightly with brown or black around the larger end, which the nest contained early in the season,

brought forth some tiny fledgelings that thrilled the mother with pride when she thought that one day they might equal, or outstrip, their father in singing!

But alas! there was another birdie in one nest that we found—an over-grown, alien creature,



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

RED-EYED VIREO

A public speaker who delights to "tell the world" on all occasions.

who could not be taught manners, and who persisted in eating everything brought to the nest that he could gobble, and who finally ended by pushing his timid little foster brothers out of the nest, and later deserting his well-nigh heart-broken parents in the most shameless fashion. So much for the dashed hopes of one family of vireos! Let's hope, however, that they found some pleasure in watching the dainty little tricks of a neighboring vireo's happy family, and that

next time gentle, unsuspecting little Mrs. Red-eye will not be imposed upon by the scheming cow-bird!

The red-eyed vireo is never seen on the ground. His hunting, singing, and resting are all done high and safe among the green leaves. All worms and bugs are killed by striking them against a twig before swallowing them, as he has no fondness for a wriggling diet.

#### THE YELLOW-THROATED VIREO

Through saffron tints of twilight,

Moves the young moon remote.

Ah, listen! Wandering, sweet—

The Vireo's tender note.

All that was dear in yesteryear,

Or dreamed, or won, or missed,

The Vireo flutes at eventide—

When Memory's keeping tryst.

—*Lulu Wheedon Mitchell.*

The yellow-throated vireo is the beauty of the family and one of the sweetest singers. Mr. Chapman says: "If the red-eyed vireo is a soprano, the yellow-throat is a contralto. He sings much the same tune, but his notes are deeper and richer, while they are uttered more deliberately and with greater expression than those of his somewhat too voluble cousin. '*See me; I'm here; where are you?*' he calls, and at intervals repeats

his question in varying forms. Sometimes he astonishes us by an intricate liquid trill which suggests the wonderful song of the ruby kinglet, but which unfortunately is sometimes marred by the scolding notes that precede or follow it."

The scolding notes of yellow-throat sound like "*Zee, tzee, tzee, tzu, tzu*" rapidly repeated. He trills out a sweet song as he works diligently in the tops of the tall trees. He is said to be the only vireo that sings as he flies.

This vireo may easily be known by his beautiful lemon-yellow throat and upper breast and his yellow coat shading into olive-green on shoulders, back, and head. The wings and tail are brown with many quills edged with white, and the wings are marked by bands of white. His range is from the Gulf to British boundaries and westward to the Rockies, with winter quarters in tropical regions. Although he is a bird of the forests, preferably of the forests bordering some stream, he may frequently be seen in the tree-tops of orchard and lawn, just as though he were paying us a sociable call.

The nest of the yellow-throated vireo, in its woodland home from ten to forty feet above the ground, is one of the most beautiful structures known to bird art. A writer in *Birds and Nature* gives the following apt description: "While the materials used in their construction are not un-

like those used by the other vireos, the nests are somewhat larger. They are frequently entirely covered in a most artistic manner with lichens and mosses which are fastened to the outer surface of the nest with the webs of spiders and threads from the silky covering of the cocoons of silk-weaving moths. Thus the nests resemble bunches of moss, pensive from the forked branches of the trees. The nests are constructed by inter-weaving various fine fibers, both plant and animal hairs, grasses, and sometimes pieces of string and shreds of cloth. . . . The male assists his mate in the performance of the duties of incubation, but he has the unfortunate habit of singing while on the nest—a habit which shows a happy disposition but is opposed to the best interests of the birds.”

#### *THE SOLITARY VIREO*

The solitary vireo, or blue-headed greenlet, is not so retiring as his name would indicate. He is a bird of the bushy woodland, and though perhaps only a comparative few have a bowing acquaintance with him, many have heard his song,—so many, in fact, that their united praises have made him celebrated. One admirer describes his tender notes as a “pure, serene, uplifting of its loving, trustful nature that seems inspired by a fine spirituality.”

The species may be identified by their dusky olive coats, whitish vests washed with greenish-yellow on the sides, blue-gray heads, white eye-ring which spreads into a patch on the side of the head, dusky-olive wings barred by two white bands, and a dusky tail with a few white-edged quills. They range westward to the plains and northward to the British provinces, wintering in Florida and southward.

This vireo cradles her babies in a "beautiful little structure of pine needles, plant fibers, dry leaves, and twigs, all lichen lined and bound and rebound with coarse spiders' webs" built in the crotch of the hazel brush or some other convenient low bush in the woodland.

#### *THE WHITE-EYED VIREO*

The white-eyed vireo, like his cousin red-eye, often nests in the maples on the lawn. He is the scold of the family—a veritable little shrew. Of him one observer says: "Taking up a residence in the tangled shrubbery or thickety undergrowth, it immediately begins to scold like a crotchety old wren. It becomes irritated over the merest trifles—a passing bumblebee, a visit from another bird to its tangle, an unsuccessful peck at a gnat—anything seems calculated to rouse its wrath and set every feather on its little body a-trembling, while it sharply snaps out

what might perhaps be freely constructed into cuss-words."

Mr. and Mrs. White-eye are a combination of bright grayish-olive green and white. Wings and tail are brownish edged with yellow and two yellow bars adorn the wings. The eye is inclosed in a yellow ring which extends from the beak, and the iris is white. They have the usual range and nesting habits of the red-eyed vireo, and despite their bad tempers, are just as frequently imposed upon as others by the sneaking cowbird.

Mr. White-eye is sometimes mistaken for the chat on account of his ventriloquistic powers and his habit of talking to himself; however his irritable temper soon disillusions the curious inquirer who ventures too near his "fighting line." His call note is a spiteful little "*Chick-a-rer chick*" that may be heard all over the garden. His song, when he will really consent to quit his fooling and get down to business, is sweet and charming. He is so fond of holding forth to some fancied audience from the top of a stump, that he has been nicknamed "The Politician."

#### THE WARBLING VIREO

The warbling vireo is a very happy, musical little fellow, as we discovered the other morning when we heard some little bird fairly bursting his

throat with delicious warblings. High up in the top-most branches of the tallest maple in the row which bordered the alley was the singer. His notes suggested a warbler (and, indeed, it is said that the warbling vireo is the connecting link between these two insect-loving families), but a few distinctive markings soon named him the warbling vireo. There was the little ash-colored head and neck with the dusky line over the eye, the barless wings, the yellow breast and the whitish-yellow throat and underparts, and we knew him at once and gave him silent greetings.

When the carol was finished he went back to work. Then over and over again he kept saying what sounded to us like "*Little dear, little dear,*" though wiser folks claim that he says "*Brig-a-dier, Brig-a-dier, Brig-ate.*" Though why should he? Of course, some one has fabricated a tale that he is a major-general of some flower host and that his cry is alike a warning and command to his under officer. But isn't it more than half likely that, instead of this nonsense, he is calling out "*Little dear, little dear,*" just to assure his wife, who is probably nesting high in a tall old poplar in an unfrequented thicket, that he is busily working and thinking of her.

Not many spare minutes has this charming vireo, so he needs must sing as he works. All through the golden morning hours and the heat



of the afternoon he keeps up his untiring warble. Like many of his cousins, he is rather shy at nesting time, and resorts to the deep woods. But he knows whom to trust, and will on occasion nest in the orchard, though he much prefers a giant old poplar such as he can frequently find in old country homes or quiet village streets.

## THE CUCKOOS

**D**O you know the cuckoos? Lots of people call them rain crows. They are not social birds, and seldom indeed are any number of them found nesting near each other. Yet it would be hard indeed to find more useful birds. They are particularly fond of tent caterpillars and measuring worms, and delight to kill far more than they eat. Some one has said that one pair of cuckoos in the orchard was worth more than a dozen robins.

The cuckoo sits around and mopes as if he had something weighing upon his mind. He is strange and reserved, "untouched by joy and grief, fear or anger." His call note, sounding from the depths of the orchard or the woodland, is as of one lost or wandering.

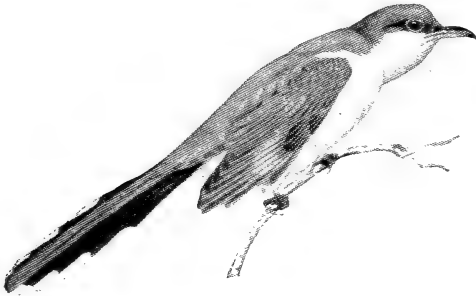
Repeated like a soul that grieves—

"Kou-kou, kou-kou"—a solemn plaint

Now loud and full, now far and faint.

The cuckoo family numbers nearly two hundred species, but only thirty-five reside in America. Of these only the yellow-billed and the black-billed are at all common, and they look

so much alike as to be often confused. But you may tell them apart easily enough, if you can get near them, by the color of their bills, and by the red eye-ring which marks the black-billed bird. The yellow-billed cuckoo also has some distinguishing white "thumb nail" marks on his tail.



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

#### YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO

A mysterious sort of chap who seems to have an ingrown attack of the blues.

Both birds are grayish-brown, shading to grayish-white underneath. They are about one-fifth longer than the robin, the female being larger than her mate, an unusual thing in the bird world.

The poets of England have always had a great deal to say about the cuckoo. Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy called him "the darling of the spring," and used to watch eagerly for his arrival in the tangled shrubbery on the hillside back of Dove Cottage. The same poet says: "O

Cuckoo! shall I call thee bird? Or but a wandering voice?" But the English bird is much more of a "merry harbinger" than ours—for our cuckoo, no matter what other talents he may possess, is certainly not musical.

There is an odd species of laughing cuckoo in Mexico, which has fallen into disgrace among the natives. They despise him as a messenger of evil. For whenever any misfortune is about to occur the bird is sure to be heard fairly bursting his sides with delight!

In Scotland the popular name for the cuckoo is "the gawk," which means fool. Why? Probably because of the bird's shiftless habit of laying her eggs in some unsuspecting neighbor's nest and leaving the rearing of her young to the tender mercies of the little foster mother. But our American cuckoos are a long way from gawks. Indeed many farmers consider them fine weather prophets. "Hark! hear the rain crow," they say; "we shall surely have rain." And though there is often not "a hint of rain in thirsty heaven or on burning plain," the prophecy proves true. Soon "great water-carrier winds bring their buckets brimming with freshness; their dippers ring and flash and rumble" and the rain pours down.

Our cuckoos also raise their own young. But they are sorry mothers. They do not know how

to build a nest or to manage a nursery, and they are notoriously dirty housekeepers—a surprising fact, for the birds themselves are so trim and dainty. Frequently Mrs. Cuckoo lays an egg while she is brooding over an egg nearly ready to hatch, and sometimes, too, there are clamorous, half-grown fledgelings in the nest at the same time! Such shocking mismanagement, no doubt, drives Mr. Cuckoo distracted. He shuns his home, neglecting all his duties but that of watchman, and seeks a new mate every season, probably hoping to get a better housekeeper. But he never does. Perhaps if the lazy fellow would lend a hand now and then, his poor, over-worked spouse might have more time to keep things tidy!

Cuckoo eggs are lusterless, pale greenish-blue. Sometimes the nest is nothing but a mere platform of leaves, carelessly dropped into the bush, where the hapless babies will not have far to fall when they tumble out of bed, as they often do. Again it may be quite well fashioned, and lined with dry ferns, leaves, and catkins. But always there is a helter-skelter look about it, and it is unspeakably dirty and alive with lice and mites. The mother bird is quite devoted to her babies. If you go near the nest, she will tumble to the ground in pretended fright and do her best to trail you away by feigning lameness and making funny little sounds as if she is certainly choking

to death. As soon as you have gone, she will move the babies, Tabby-fashion, to some more private quarters.

A charge of eating other birds' eggs is sometimes brought against the cuckoo. But good authorities claim there is no ground for this, and that it is only the "rarest dissipation." Cuckoos prefer an insect diet—hairy caterpillars, large moths, click beetles, and saw-flies being great favorites. And so many of the former do they eat, that a cuckoo's stomach, on being opened, looks as if lined with a thin coating of fur!

Our cuckoo does not often repeat his name, like his English kin, or like the familiar cuckoo which flies out of the doors in the clock. His call notes, "*Kuk, k-kuk, k-kuk, k-kuk,*" sound considerably like a turkey. His song, if song it may be called, is like the plaintive murmurings of a pigeon. Indeed, the black-billed cuckoo is often called the wood pigeon, because of his peculiar resemblance to the passenger pigeon, traceable not only in his call but in his red eye-circle, the shape of his head, and his motions on alighting and on taking wing.

The cuckoos are own cousins to the kingfishers, and are frequently found nesting not far from these interesting kin in the brush land along a stream, but so shy and reserved are they that you

will need to look twice to find them. They migrate in May and September, ranging from Panama to cold latitudes. They are seldom seen west of the Rocky Mountains.

## SOME DISTANT RELATIVES

**T**HE whip-poor-will, the chimney-swift, and the ruby-throated humming-bird are the feathered friends we wish to tell you about here. They are so unlike in size, coloring, and general appearance that it is difficult to believe them kin; yet when one studies them carefully, they are found to have many points in common. For instance, all have small, weak feet and powerful wings, and nearly all have the habit of seeking their food at night, and of catching insects while on the wing. The goatsuckers and nighthawks are other well-known members of the family. It is a long jump from the goatsucker to the humming-bird, as you may readily see, but there are many connecting links in the far South who can not be tempted from their tropical homes.

### *THE WHIP-POOR-WILL*

Lone Whip-poor-will,  
There is much sweetness in thy fitful hymn,  
Heard in the drowsy watches of the night.  
Ofttimes, when all the village lights are out,  
And the wide air is still, I hear thee chant



Thy hollow dirge, like some recluse, who takes  
His lodging in the wilderness of woods,  
And lifts his anthem when the world is still;  
And the dim, solemn night, that brings to man  
And to the herds, deep slumbers, and sweet dews  
To the red roses and the herbs, doth find  
No eye, save thine, a watcher in her halls.  
I hear thee oft at midnight, when the thrush  
And the green, roving linnet are at rest,  
And the blithe, twittering swallows have long ceased  
Their noisy note, and folded up their wings.

—*Birds and All Nature.*

“*Whip-poor-will! Whip-poor-will!*” who has not heard the mournful wail? And where is the school boy who has not queried: “Why should Will be whipped?” Just so. What strange trick of fate compels the bird to utter this woeful call forever? Did some member of his clan, named Will, way back in the Dark Ages, receive a sound thrashing for some misdemeanor, and did he wail out over and over in anger and misery “They whipped poor Will!” until his bird brothers took up the refrain never again to lay down the burden? So the legend has it, and who shall say if it be true?

The whip-poor-will is a member of the Goat-sucker Family of which there are about 100 species. Of his next in kin, perhaps the Chuck-Will’s widow and the nighthawk are the best known. He is often confused with the latter,

but it is only by the inexperienced, as the birds are unlike in habits, though alike in coloring. For instance, the whip-poor-will is a forest bird; the nighthawk prefers the open country. The whip-poor-will is a bird of the night; the night-hawk (Oh, misleading name!) is a bird of the day and early evening. Then, too, the night-hawk has a distinguishing mark in the shape of white bars on the under surface of his wings, which may plainly be seen while the bird is performing his wonderful feats on wing.

The whip-poor-will is a shaggy, long winged, mottled bird of reddish-brown, grayish-black, and murky-white, about the size of the robin, though his long, wide-spread wings make him appear much larger. A narrow white band outlines the upper edge of his vest, and his tail quills are white on the end and underside. His large fly-trap mouth is fringed with stiff bristles. The female is much like her mate, excepting for a buff vest edging and dusky-white markings on the tail, where her lord wears white.

The birds range over the United States westward to the plains from April to September, keeping well back from the sea and apparently having little liking for the roaring monster. They love a patch of rocky, forest waste where they may sleep undisturbed through even the

most perfect days. They have a habit of roosting length-wise on a lichen-covered bough or ledge, and so much do they resemble their surroundings that they are often passed unnoticed. If disturbed, they will flit away without a sound, leaving the intruder gazing after them in surprise.

We once had the good fortune to come upon two whip-poor-wills side by side on a bough, or rather nose to nose on a bough. So dead to the world were they that we tumbled the well-fed young fellows over and over in our hands before they could be induced to open one sleepy little eye even half-way. Perhaps they were shamming, for we, stirred to pity by their condition, ceased tormenting them and placed them carefully on the limb again to snooze, intending to keep our eye on them, but when we looked again, in the course of half an hour or more, they were gone. Silently indeed had they stolen away, for we had remained all the time within ten feet of the limb!

Few birds' nests are harder to find than the whip-poor-will's. So perfectly does the mother bird match the surroundings which she chooses for a nesting site, that one may walk right over her and never see her unless she chooses to take alarm, which she usually does, clucking like an old hen and limping away in a pitiful fashion

fully intent on luring one to follow her until well away from the vicinity of the nest.

*Nest*, did we say? There really is no carefully built nest. Just a little hollow in the ground, or possibly in a low stump, lined with dry leaves, on which the creamy white eggs, dashed and spotted with olive, find a soft bed. The young fledglings are like tiny balls of buff down, but they have tempers of their own and will peck a hand extended to pet them. The mothers are suspicious creatures and will generally move eggs, or young, if they are discovered, carrying them in their mouth as a cat carries her kittens.

In spite of the fact that superstitious people regard the whip-poor-will as an uncanny bird, he really is very beneficial. Traveling at night, as he does, he entraps many winged night prowlers that do harm to vegetation. So noiseless is his flight that doubtless many winged creatures fly straight into his trap-like mouth without even suspecting that he is in their vicinity! Blanchan aptly terms the bird "a sentry at his post, or a watchman of the night" and says that our Dutch ancestors claimed that no frost ever appeared after his call was heard in the spring, and that he always left before a cold snap came on in the fall. So he is wiser or luckier than some other folks we know.

*THE CHIMNEY-SWIFT*

Uncumbered neighbor of our race!

Thou only of thy clan

Hast made thy haunts and dwelling-place

Within the walls of man.

With thee, beneath our sheltering roof,

The starry Sphinx doth dwell,

Untamed, eternally aloof

And inaccessible!

—*Dora Read Goodale.*

The chimney-swift, or chimney-swallow, as he is often wrongly called, is no relation to the swallow family that decks the eaves of our out-buildings with their adobe homes. He is a tree swift, belonging to a family of about seventy-five species, and is own cousin to the nighthawk and whip-poor-will. In this instance, at least, the *name* means something. These birds have wonderful powers of flight and endurance, often traveling one thousand miles in a single night and day. Their flight is a peculiar, mechanical, rowing motion, almost devoid of grace, but very sure and powerful.

The swifts are entirely American birds and are common summer residents east of the Rockies. They are about an inch shorter than the English sparrow, though their long wings extending beyond their short even tail, with its pointed,

200 LITTLE FRIENDS IN FEATHERS

elastic tail quills, which serve as props, make them seem much larger. They are sooty-gray,



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

CHIMNEY-SWIFT

These tireless little fellows spend nearly the entire day on the wing.

energetic birds with muscular feet and very sharp claws.

Almost the whole day is spent upon the wing, catching enormous numbers of insects. They are found in immense flocks, especially when nesting or roosting. Apgar says: "In certain places where large unused chimneys are found, great flocks of these birds will be seen in the early morning, flying out from the chimney top, and starting on their day's work of ridding the air of flying insects. In the evening all will be found returning, a steady stream, into the same roosting place. When resting on the inner wall of the chimney, the spiny tail is used as a support, much as the woodpeckers use their tails against the bark of tree trunks."

Where chimneys are not to be had, the swifts content themselves with a hollow tree, and instances are on record of their having built their homes in belfries, barns, and cupolas. The nest is made in lattice effect with twigs broken off by the birds while in flight, and fastened together and to the support with a sticky substance from the bird's mouth. Five or six pure white eggs are laid for a sitting, and usually two broods are hatched in a season. It is said that the parent birds cautiously crowd the little ones from the nest to teach them to cling to the walls and learn proper use of claws, wings, and tail.

The swifts are not musical birds, but a colony of them in a chimney produces a cheerful twit-

tering that is apt to grow monotonous. The whir of their wings as they rise from their home has been likened to distant thunder. Some one has said that the swifts bring luck to the home of the householder in whose chimney they dwell, but the New England dames say they are more likely to bring bugs! And they often have wire screens stretched over their chimneys to keep the birds out.

*THE RUBY-THROATED HUMMING-BIRD*

Voyager on golden air  
 Type of all that's fleet and fair,  
 Incarnate gem,  
 Live diadem,  
 Bird beam of the summer day,—  
 Whither on your sunny way?

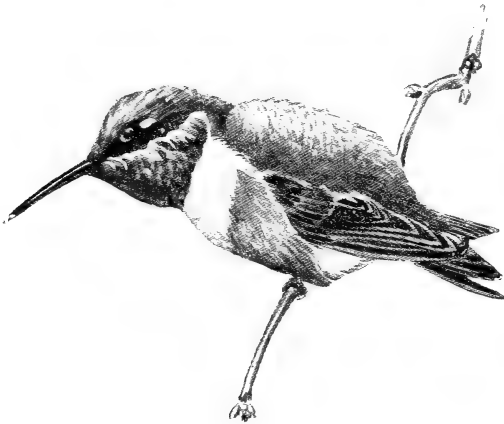
—*John Vance Cheney.*

The ruby-throated humming-bird enjoys the distinction of being our smallest bird, and is only about half as long as the English sparrow. He belongs to a large family of over four hundred species, but he is the only one found East of the Mississippi River and North of Florida. He has several relatives in the Rocky Mountains and in Texas, but the majority of the great family live in Mexico and South America, too well satisfied with their luxuriant surroundings to care to venture into unknown pastures, even though



their more daring relatives bring home glowing accounts of the nectar and flowers to be found in our clime.

All of the humming-birds are small, brightly colored, swiftly flying birds, living mainly on the insects which they obtain while on the wing and



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

#### RUBY-THROATED HUMMING-BIRD

Our smallest bird, whose spunk is about ten times his size.

the nectar found in flowers. Their movements through the air are very swift and insect-like, the wings vibrating so rapidly as to be lost to the eye in a hazy mist. Nearly all, excepting some tropical forms, have weak, squeaking voices. The ruby-throat is seen by most people only when it is hovering over flowers in search of food, but if carefully watched it may be seen to rest on the

twigs of tree-tops. Sometimes it is mistaken for the hawk moth, but it need not be, if the observer will remember that the humming-bird is a day-time bird, while the moth is rarely found except in the evening.

The ruby-throat is clothed in bright metallic green, which grows darker on wings and tail and shades into grayish underneath. The throat and breast are bright, changeable, orange-red flame, outlined with a white border. Dusky-white tips ornament the outer tail feathers. The bill is like a long, sharp needle. Mrs. Humming-bird lacks the beautiful throat decoration and is darker gray underneath. Her outer tail quills are banded with black and tipped with white.

Though the smallest bird in existence, the humming-bird has the largest temper. "A lion is not as fierce as he nor as ready to fight against odds." He seems ever on the alert for an excuse to plunge his needle-like dagger into the jeweled bosom of his enemy. Keyser, in *Bird Land*, says: "A writer describes the contests of certain humming-birds in the island of Jamaica when moved by jealousy. When two males have become rivals, they will level their long, pointed bills at each other, and then dash together with the swiftness of an arrow; they meet; separate, meet again, with shrill chirping, dart upward, then downward, and circle around and around,

until the eye grows weary of watching them, and can no longer follow their rapid transits. At length one falls, exhausted, to the ground, while the other rests, panting and trembling, on a leafy spray, or perhaps tumbles, mortally wounded, to the earth. There are some diminutive hummers, called Mexican Stars, which become perfect furies when their jealousy is aroused. Their throats swell; their crests, wings, and tail expand; and they clinch and spear each other in the air like the veriest disciples of Bellona."

The nest of the humming-bird is a perfect type of bird architecture. It is a small cup, about half the size of a hen's egg, composed of woolly vegetable substance and other soft material, covered on the outside with small pieces of lichen, fastened on with spiders' webs or plant fibers, and saddled on a tree branch, which the nest exactly matches in coloring, from ten to fifty feet above the ground. It contains two white eggs, which later develop into tiny caterpillar-like objects, about the size of a honey bee, covered with a few scattering hairs. It takes about three weeks for the tiny mites to grow a coat of feathers and fly from the nest.

These are anxious days both for birdlings and parents. You see the nest is so tiny that, as the birdlings gain in weight, they are in imminent danger of being crowded over the edge. Then,

too, it is a tedious task to hunt insects and convert them into shape for the birdies' stomachs. They are fed from the parent's stomach. Mrs. Olive Thorne Miller gives the following apt description of the odd process which many have witnessed:

"This is the way my fairy-like mother administered the staff of life to her tender birdlings. Alighting on the edge of the nest, she leaned over, and with her beak jerked a little head into sight above the edge; then down the baby's throat she thrust her long beak its whole length; and it looked actually longer than the youngster itself. Then she prodded and shook the unfortunate nestling, who seemed to hold on, till I wondered his head did not come off. It was truly fearful to witness. In a moment, shaking off, apparently with difficulty, that one, who dropped out of sight, she jerked up the other, and treated it in the same rough way, shaking her own body from head to tail by her exertion. Thus alternately she fed them, three or four times before she finished; and then she calmly slipped on to the nest, wriggling and twisting about as if she were pawing them with her feet. There she sat for five or six minutes before darting away for fresh supplies, while I wondered if the two victims of this Spartan method were lying dead, stabbed to death, or smothered by their own

mother. But I did her tenderness and her motherhood injustice."

The ruby-throat is no more afraid of man than he is of his brethren, albeit he is not quite so warlike! He will come uninvited to dip honey with his needle-like bill from the trumpet flowers on the porch railing, and does not mind an audience at all, provided they keep quiet. Mrs. Miller gives a good description of one hot-tempered little lady-bird flying into a violent passion if, by chance, the flower fell to pieces as she thrust in her bill. Such conduct is typical of the whole flock of hot-headed little creatures. They are living examples of the phrase "a giant passion may dwell in pygmy form."

## SOME WINTER VISITORS

**O**UR winter visitors comprise those birds which come to us from the North along late in the fall with the cold winds and the snow, and return to their homes again in the spring. They nest in the North, so we do not see them at their most blithe and joyous time, but we are grateful for the good cheer they bring into our bleak, wintry days.

### *THE SNOW BUNTINGS, OR SNOWFLAKES*

These little nurslings of the snow seem to be a part of the drifting snow-storms and northeast gales. Indeed, Thoreau calls them "the true spirits of the snowstorm." They enjoy our fiercest gales and whirl dizzily through the drifting snow when all other birds have sought cover, but no doubt our bitterest weather only seems mild in comparison with their Arctic climate. They are often seen to plunge into a snow-bank, and it is said they frequently pass the night enveloped in its folds.

The snowflake is a member of the Finch family and is about six or seven inches long. He is called by several names, among them being those

of white bird and snow lark. It is said that his summer dress is almost snow white, and that he has a very inspiring song, but while with us he is dressed in a combination of soft gray, brown and white, and his song is a cheerful twitter. They always visit us in flocks, and as they fly airily over the snow-covered fields they remind us at first glance of a whirl of dead leaves. Burroughs says of them:

    Their coats are dappled white and brown  
    Like fields in winter weather,  
But on the azure sky they float  
    Like snowflakes knit together.

    O cheery bird of winter cold,  
    I bless thy every feather;  
Thy voice brings back dear boyhood days  
    When we were gay together.

#### *THE GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET*

With the exception of the winter wren and the humming-bird the kinglet is the smallest bird that we have, being about two inches smaller than the English sparrow. He is a nervous, restless little chap, and jumps about in evident enjoyment of the cold, having so much energy and merry activity that our coldest days do not even chill his ardor. He is a very sociable fellow and is often found in company with other birds.

The golden-crowned kinglets come to us from the North in the fall when our autumn woods is clothed in its gayest dress. They rove about in merry little bands, searching continually for insects under the bark of the evergreens, until sometime in April. They nest in the northern parts of the United States and farther northward; very rarely is one found as far south as the White Mountains. The nest is a surprise to us. It seems so large for such a tiny bird, but when we peep into the well-made structure of moss, plant fibers, and strips of bark, lined with warm feathers, and see as many as eight or ten creamy-white eggs all speckled with brown and lavender, our surprise changes to amazement. How can such a tiny mother cover so many eggs? Imagine what busy times the little parents must have with ten hungry mouths to feed!

This little bird is an acrobat, and can do many tricks, like the nuthatch, "head upward, head downward, it's all one to him." He has a beautiful love song, far out of proportion to his size, and frequently favors us with a few practice solos before flying away in the spring to woo his mate with bursts of lyrical melody. His winter call is a shrill, stirring *zee, zee*.

It is a difficult thing to get a kinglet to keep quiet long enough to see what he looks like. He is a handsome combination of grayish olive-green,



soiled-white underparts, and a bright orange crown bordered with yellow and inclosed by a black ring. Some ornithologists class the kinglet among the wrens, and call him the fiery-crowned wren. He is also known as the golden-crowned goldcrest. He has a merry hearted cousin, a trifle larger than himself, called the ruby-crowned kinglet, or wren. He wears a ruby crest, prefers a warm climate, and is as much a feathered embodiment of perpetual motion as is his gold-crested cousin. Both birds are dainty and charming and are inveterate workers. Blanchan says: "They are not at all shy; you may approach them quite close if you will, for the birds are simply too intent on their business to be concerned with yours."

#### *THE BROWN CREEPER*

The brown creeper is a familiar little sprite of the winter woods that goes creeping round and round to the very topmost branches of the tallest trees. He is a trifle smaller than the English sparrow, but he has the largest conscience ever rolled into one bit of feathers. He often retraces his path over the tree for fear he may have been too hasty and missed one little egg or juicy insect.

While with us from September to April, he lives a solitary humdrum life of toil. He seems

to like to pursue his search for insects in a neighborly fashion with a band of cheery chickadees or nuthatches. Doubtless they give him courage and spur him on to greater victories. Occasionally he is inspired to burst out into song, and the result is so delightfully sweet that we wish it came oftener.

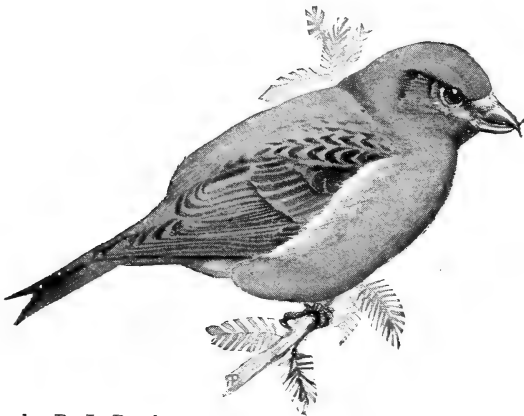
The brown creeper is between five and six inches in length. His upper part is brown with mottled ashy-gray stripes; underneath he is grayish-white. His wings are brown, barred with white. He has a long brown tail and a slender curving bill. It is difficult to locate him. He is so quiet and unobtrusive, so nearly like the gray-brown bark where he feeds, that one may pass quite near and never see him. He is one of Nature's best counterfeits, and carries out his own color scheme in the building of his nest, which he tucks carefully away under some piece of loosened bark.

The brown creeper has a large number of English cousins, but he is the only one of his family in the United States, and then he only condescends to live about eight months with us, spending his summer and nesting in Canada.

#### *THE CROSSBILL*

The American crossbill is an irregular winter visitor that usually arrives from the North in No-

vember and sometimes stays until April. In the higher parts of the Alleghanies and in northern New England the crossbill frequently stays all the year. He is a handsome bird of Indian red and brownish-gray, with brown wings and tail, about the size of the English sparrow. His mate is a greenish-yellow, tinted with brown.



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

#### CROSSBILL

Mr. Crossbill doesn't want your sympathy because of his crossed bill; he finds it very handy.

The crossbill has a peculiar beak, crossed at the tip parrot fashion. It is the only native bird with this curious crossing of the bills. On this peculiarity hangs a beautiful legend. It seems that when the Savior hung upon the cross, this valiant little sympathizer came and pulled at the cruel nails which pierced His hands,—pulled with all his might and main, until he twisted his beak and

dyed his brownish coat a bright crimson shade.

The crossbills feed almost entirely upon the seeds of the pine, their brilliant plumage against the green making a charming bit of color on a winter's day. At first thought it would seem that these birds would be hampered in getting seeds from the pine cones by their curious shaped bills, but a few minutes spent in watching them is convincing. They insert their crossed mandibles between the scales of a pine cone, and force it off with a quick twist, securing the seed at the base. Occasionally they scrape their bills across a cone dislodging a whole shower of scales which whirl softly down to the ground, then the crossbills follow and gather up the seeds at their leisure.

It is claimed that the crossbills are very fond of salt, and that an old pickle keg or a salt barrel will attract them like deers to a salt lick. They are very sociable and can be quite easily coaxed into friendly relations. It is amusing to watch them swing from the trees parrot style, or to see them snap at the pine cones and call out *kimp*, *kimp* in their dry, sharp fashion.

The crossbills fly in flocks to their northern homes, sounding forth their sharp, clicking call note as they wing their way. Their love song is said to be a low, musical murmur, like the babbling of a brook on a mid-summer day.

*THE HORNED LARK*

The horned, or shore, lark is a familiar winter resident in the northern and eastern section from Ohio to the seaboard and southward to the tropics. In New England these birds arrive in great companies, about the first of October, and disappear generally with the approach of the first snowstorm. As the season advances, they are particularly numerous in South Carolina and Georgia, according to Nuttall, "frequenting open plains, old fields, commons, and the dry shores and banks of bays and rivers, keeping constantly on the ground, and roving about in families under the guidance of the older birds, who, watching for any approaching danger, give the alarm to the young in a plaintive call very similar to that which is uttered by the skylark in the same circumstances. Inseparable in all their movements, like the hen and her chickens, they roost together in a close ring or company, by the mere edge of some sheltering weed or tuft of grass on the dry and gravelly ground, and thickly and warmly clad, they abide the frost and the storm with hardy indifference."

As the supply of weed seeds, berries, larvæ, and sleeping insects in their feeding ground is exhausted, they range elsewhere, and by a clever management and economy, since they often live

on almost nothing at all, they keep themselves fat. They are offered in the southern markets, and are highly prized as a food.

The horned larks are numbered among the few bird walkers, and are birds of the ground. When disturbed, they run a little distance and then seek to hide themselves by squatting flat.



Courtesy of Am. Mus. Nat. Hist.

#### HORNED LARK

A bird who knows how to keep fat on very little to eat.

In their northern home, far away in Labrador and Greenland, it is said the male horned lark often rises into the air, warbling as he ascends, after the fashion, if not so musically, of his cousin the European skylark. But with us mum is the word, save for the sharp call note of the sentinels when danger is near.

The horned lark we know is but a pale edition every way of the bird in his summer, love-warm glory of the tropics. His dull brown coat, then, gives place to a wondrously beautiful chocolate-colored suit, tinted and streaked with pinkish-gray. The few erect feathers on the sides of his head deepen and grow into very black, horn-like egrets. His throat glows with a richer, yellower hue, and the dainty crescent-shaped black patch on his breast takes on a jaunty, glossy sheen, making in all a most gorgeous display of wedding finery. And an ardent, devoted mate is the horned lark. He roosts on the ground, close bedded in moss, beside his brooding spouse, and leaves her only for the brief time necessary to take his meals, and for his sudden flights of cheering song in the air high above her.

#### *THE JOLLY CHICKADEE*

Chic-Chic-a-dee-dee! saucy note  
Out of sound heart and merry throat,  
As if it said, "Good-day, good Sir!  
Fine afternoon, old passenger!  
Happy to meet you in these places,  
Where January brings few faces."

—Emerson.

The chickadee, or black-capped titmouse, is a cheery, fearless, sociable little bird. Though he is here through the summer, we always associate

him with the bleak days of winter, as it is then that he fills our hearts with cheer by his contagious overflow of good spirits. Florence Van Sant, in a few charming verses, dubs him Mr. Chickadee, D.D., and says:

“The sermon we should not forget:  
 ‘Happy and cheerful be.  
 Have diligence, be brave, don’t fret,’  
 Says Chickadee, D. D.”

“Little Friend” is the meaning of the word *Chickadee*, and he who bears it most nobly fulfils the promise of his name. No other bird is so easily tamed. He is always grateful for the smallest favors, and may readily be coaxed to eat from the hands of his friends. He loves a pine tree, and always sleeps in one, if possible, to be more safe from the owl and other enemies. The little bird in his downy plumage is very aptly described by Kelly, who queries:—

“Do you know the little titmouse,  
 In his brownish-ashen coat,  
 With his cap so black and jaunty,  
 And a black patch on his throat?”

He is about an inch smaller than the English sparrow—not quite six inches in length; but he seems much shorter, on account of a plump body and long pointed tail. There is no bird that can compare with him in destroying the canker-worm



moth and its eggs. One authority estimates that he destroys about 5,500 eggs in a single day. His eyes are very bright, and he searches so industriously in the buds and under the bark of the trees



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

#### CHICKADEE

A sociable little fellow who brings his welcome with him.

that it is seldom an insect or an egg escapes him. The chickadee nests in the summer woods, choosing a knot hole, a hollow rail, or the old home which some woodpecker or nuthatch has carefully hollowed out in a tree. If the owner enters an objection, Mr. and Mrs. Chickadee very peacefully vacate. There are usually four or five pretty white eggs delicately touched with pink.

During nesting time the chickadee changes his cheery call to a plaintive minor note like the tinkling of a tiny bell.

*THE WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH*

"*Quank, quank! hank, hank!*" What a strange cry! Who wants Hank? Is it a bird? Yes, we have found him; it is the white-breasted nuthatch, or tree mouse. See him over there! That little slate-colored bird, about six inches long, with the black cap and neck. His wings are edged with black that fades to brown; his tail is brownish black with white bars; the underpart of his body and the sides of his head are white, shading to a pale red under the tail. His bill is longer than his head.

The nuthatch is the acrobat of the woods. The tree is his gymnasium and he performs all kinds of feats. He creeps in every direction with the agility of a mouse. Indeed, at a little distance, when one can not see the white breast, his little slate-colored coat reminds one of a mouse. He is fond of clinging to a branch and swinging with his head downwards. His build is no different from other birds, excepting his slightly enlarged toe-nails, and yet one of his greatest characteristics is the ease with which he runs up and down tree-trunks. He especially delights in doing everything head downwards. Audubon says

that the nuthatch even sleeps with his head hanging down.

A pair of these birds used to have great fun swinging on a clothes line on a friend's back porch. They would grasp the line firmly, and swing head downwards until it would seem as though their brains must be in a whirl. All at once they would flit away to a tall poplar near and run eagerly up the trunk, then come back again pell-mell, head-first and take another whirl on the line. They seldom touched the ground, and when they did, they squatted and sprawled about very awkwardly.

The nuthatch gets his name from his habit of wedging nuts in the cracks of trees, and then cracking, or "hatching," them open with strong, rapid blows from his long slender bill. After he has opened a nut, he seldom eats any of the meat, but searches for any insect larvæ that may be hidden within. He is the busiest of birds, and usually attends strictly to his own business—that of hunting and destroying insects, eggs, and larvæ under the bark of the trees by grubbing them out from their hiding places. Working, searching through the daylight hours, summer or winter, rain or shine, he performs a service for mankind which can hardly be estimated, especially among the fruit growers. If the snow is too deep on the upper side of the branch, he runs along under it

like a fly, tapping the bark adroitly with his beak until he finds a decayed spot, and then stopping to search diligently for spider eggs, and the like, calling out "Quank! quank! yank! hank!" between mouthfuls. This call note is not very musical. One writer says:

"Come, busy nuthatch, with your awl,  
But never mind your notes,  
Unless you've dropped your nasal chords  
And tuned your husky throats."

The nuthatch, however, has a rapid, merry song of tenor notes which he sings for the entertainment of his little wife during nesting time. Few people get to hear this on account of the seclusion of the nest. The nuthatches disappear in April, and formerly it was thought that they migrated, but now it is known that they only retire into the seclusion of the woods to make their nests. This nest is made of feathers and moss in a hole which the birds patiently excavate in a tree. Sometimes as many as ten eggs are laid. The birds are very proud of their home and the nest of white eggs, spotted and speckled evenly with reddish-brown and lilac. During incubation, the male bird is very devoted to his little mate, and brings her the choicest bits of the insects he waylays, and other rare morsels. When the cunning little family comes forth into the

world, both parents are very happy and busy, too, for it is no small job to grub insects and search for eggs to feed ten hungry little mouths. The



Drawing by R. I. Brasher.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH

The Nuthatch is the acrobat of the woods.

babies soon learn to creep about on their own home tree, but do not attempt to fly for some little time.

Nuthatches care for society only during the colder months when they have no family ties.

They are often seen in company with the chickadees. They dearly love a pine tree, and the colder the weather, the higher their spirits seem to run. Dr. Cheney says: "On the coldest winter day, when all seems turning to ice, what staggers our reason and commands our admiration more than to see a bit of flesh and bone not larger than your thumb, done up in feathers in such a way as to defy the cold, darting around, running up and down rough sides of the great forest trees, with his little wire legs not larger than a darning-needle and quite as naked, and toes the size of a hair, with an activity and rapidity reminding us of electricity itself? And this is only his regular exercise while getting his breakfast."

#### *THE STARLING*

Like the English sparrow, the starling is a rank interloper. He was brought here from England about 1890, and set free in Central Park, New York, and since then his hardy nature and resourceful disposition have brought him and his family into pretty general notice in the Eastern States. It seems only a question of time until he will be a common visitor all over the country.

The starling can easily be recognized by his size and manner of flight. He is about the size of the redwinged blackbird, but has a short tail.

Those who see the bird for the first time call it a blackbird with a yellow bill.

Says Mr. Edward H. Forbush in a special article on *The Starling*: "In Europe, it is one of the most abundant birds. It is conceded there that the benefits it confers on the farmer far exceed the harm that it does by attacks on fruit or crops; nevertheless, there are many instances on record where the starling has become a pest to the farmer. The habit of collecting in enormous flocks is the great element of danger. When a great number of any species having grain-eating or fruit-eating propensities is collected in one locality they are capable of doing great harm in a very short time.

"The starling is a hardy, capable and prolific bird, which like the sparrow, has had many centuries of experience in getting its living in populated countries and in cultivated regions in close relationship with man, and it has thriven in such an environment. It thus has an advantage over our native species similar to that enjoyed by the sparrow, which, subsequent to its introduction here, displaced so many native birds during the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. How can the bluebird or the house wren, which have been accustomed to life about human habitations for a comparatively short time, compete with such a bird as the starling?"

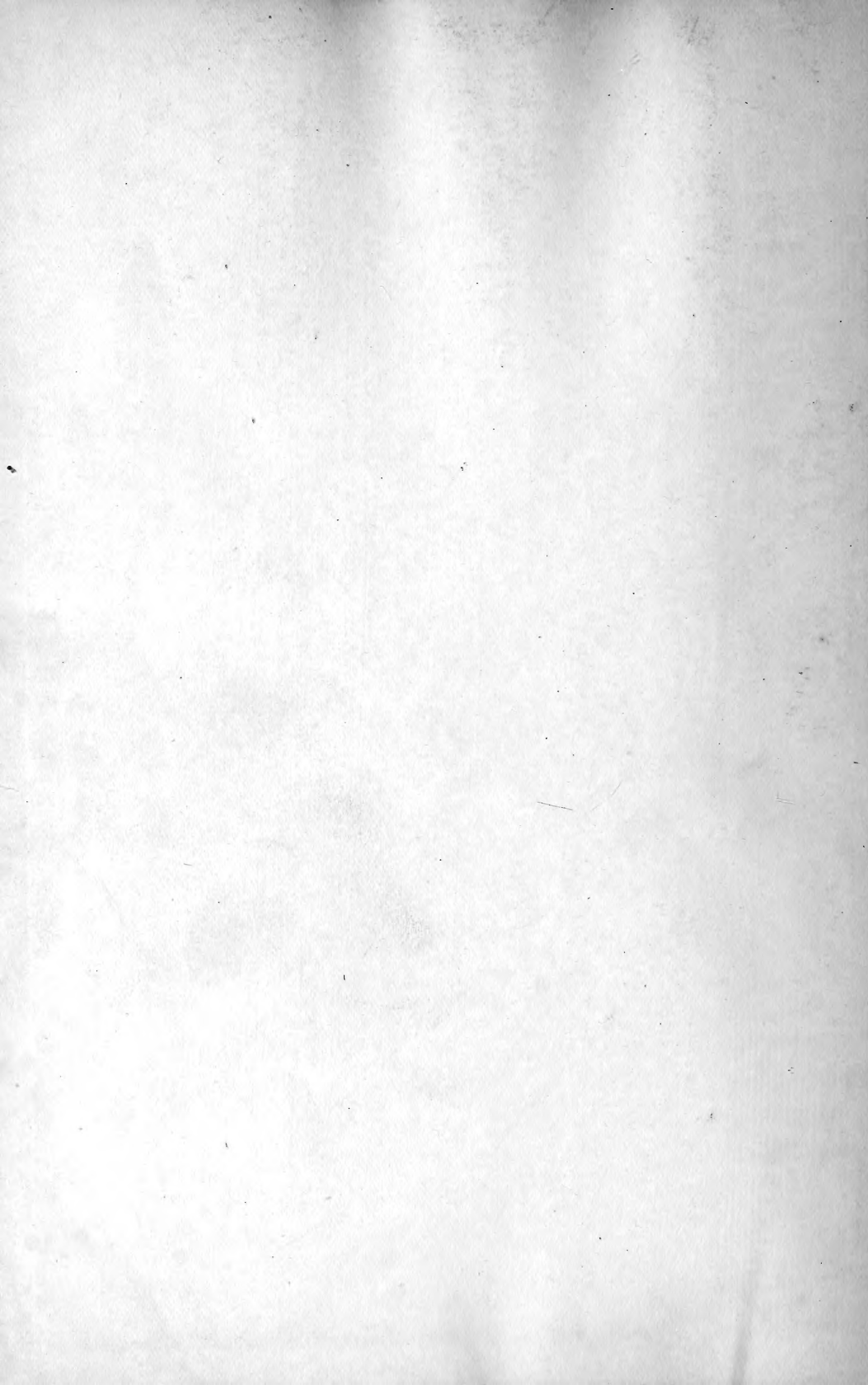
So many of our native birds have been displaced by these two alien fighters, that laws have now been made prohibiting persons from bringing foreign birds into this country, until properly vouched for by the bird "immigration officials." "America for Americans" is the cry among the bird folk and their friends.













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